



January 29, 2020

Honorable Senator Sharon Carson
Senate Executive Departments and Administration
Legislative Office Building — Room 101
33 North State Street
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Madam Chair and Committee Members,

My name is JB Brackett. I am the Public Policy Assistant with NAMI NH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I am writing to you today to express my support on behalf of NAMI NH of Senate Bill 634, relative to establishing a peer support program in the Department of Health and Human Services.

It goes without saying that the staff of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), no matter their role, are providing a great service and assistance to those in need. From child and adult protective workers, to those working in the juvenile justice system, to the employees of New Hampshire Hospital, or public health, DHHS staff provide a critical service; but they also sometimes face challenging situations.

Some of the staff of the Department of Health and Human Services are occasionally or for some regularly exposed to trauma and traumatizing events. Going into detail of the things that these people assist with is not necessary to understand they are humans themselves who deserve the same type of help they provide to others.

Exposure to the type of situations the staff of the DHHS work with is bound to result in significant stress levels which can lead to physical or emotional illnesses, interference with normal job function, interference with personal life, and more; which, if left unmanaged, can spiral into much larger problems including staff turnover.

Senate Bill 634 would establish a peer support program in the Department of Health and Human Services specifically to aid staff that have been exposed to critical incidents and trauma. Peer support generally involves individuals with lived experience of mental health conditions, allowing for a personal and empathetic form of assistance and comfort. The peer support program would help staff with critical incident stress management and crisis intervention services, which is a necessary step toward preventing worsening stress levels.

Experience is the greatest teacher, and that is why peer support programs are important — and why they work. While other mental and physical health professionals are important in the treatment of conditions, peer support helps in the management and prevention of them. For the past several years, NAMI NH has worked closely with the NH State Police in the development of their peer support program and more recently in training 911 and communications staff from the Department of Safety as peer support counselors. A peer support program in DHHS would help staff learn tactical coping

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mechanisms, stress management techniques, and communication by using their own personal experience to guide the staff member through challenging times they face while at work and when indicated, connect them with the Employee Assistance Program and other resources and supports.

Peer support programs have been shown to be effective, improving recovery outcomes for those living with mental health conditions. DHHS staff should not be excluded from the many benefits of peer support, as they are some of the most critical people in the recovery process for others.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of the important issue of the safety and well-being of our DHHS staff. On behalf of NAMI NH we ask you to vote SB 634 as ought to pass.

Sincerely,



JB Brackett
Public Policy Assistant