February 3, 2022

Honorable Chairman Rick Ladd
House Education Committee
Legislative Office Building
North State Street, Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition of HB 1198

Honorable Chairman Ladd and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Holly Stevens, and I am the Director of Public Policy at NAMI New Hampshire, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. NAMI NH is a non-profit, non-partisan, grassroots organization whose mission is to improve the lives of all people impacted by mental illness and suicide through support, education and advocacy. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am here today to speak in opposition to HB 1198, relative to rules of the department of education concerning culture and climate in schools.

Schools are a community within a community. While we would like to think of their purpose as solely to promote academic excellence, it is important to acknowledge that the learning environment and the ability of schools to teach students is greatly impacted by the social environment of the school. Governor Sununu’s School Safety Task Force (Task Force), which NAMI NH served on, recognized the importance of this in their 2018 report which emphasized that school culture is the critical first step to preventing school violence.

Per the Task Force’s 2018 report (see original for citations within):

A school’s culture is the set of norms that defines the behavior inside a school, and largely determines what is considered socially acceptable behavior between classmates, and between staff and students. Culture is significantly important to the social, emotional, and academic success of students and staff and is linked to multiple student behavioral, academic, health and social-emotional outcomes. Specifically, school culture is a significant predictor of dropout rates, absenteeism and truancy, suspension, drug use, and violent, aggressive behavior. A positive school culture is closely associated with prosocial motivation, academic motivation, self-esteem, conflict resolution, and altruistic behavior.

A positive school culture has also been linked to reducing incidences of bullying, which is frequently associated with an assailant’s decision to engage in a violent act. Additionally, research suggests that students who feel safe in schools perform better than peers who...
do not feel safe. A 2010 study correlates a student’s perceived sense of security with an 18 percent increase in student score performance.

As mentioned above, a positive school culture has been linked to reducing the incidences of bullying in schools. Not only is bullying associated with school violence, but it is also associated with high levels of suicide-related behavior. While there is not a direct causal link, involvement in bullying, along with other risk factors, increases the chance a young person will engage in suicide related behaviors. Currently, suicide is the second leading cause of death of youth and young adults in our state ages 10-34 (see chart from the US Center for Disease Control).

Any action New Hampshire can take to reduce the incidences of suicide and violence among young people is incredibly important. Our state has a vested interest in assisting the schools in cultivating a positive, safe culture and climate throughout each school system. HB 1198 would prevent the Department of Education from doing this important work.

For these reasons, NAMI NH requests the committee vote inexpedient to legislate on HB 1198. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions which you have.

Sincerely,

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

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1 The Relationship Between Bullying and Suicide: What We Know and What it Means for Schools, The CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Division of Violence Prevention, April 2014.