

April 5, 2022

Honorable Chair Karen Umberger
House Finance Committee
LOB Room 210-11
Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support of SB 227

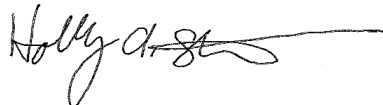
Dear Chair and Committee Members:

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, 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 support of SB 227, relative to death benefits for first responders who die from suicide.

Nationwide, law enforcement officers and firefighters are more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty as currently defined.¹ Furthermore, EMS providers are 1.39 times more likely to die by suicide than the public.² Even given the high numbers of known suicides in this population, it is surmised that many deaths by suicide go unreported. Perceived stigma around mental health issues and concerns over the potential impact on employment (i.e. being labeled “unfit” for duty) may lead first responders to not report suicidal thoughts.³

In NH, over the past five years, there have been six reported deaths via suicide in first responders.⁴ The numbers are small, averaging just over one death per year. Although the numbers are small, the impact of SB 227 would be huge. Not only would it assist the grieving families, but it would also go far in reducing stigma and discrimination due to mental health issues among first responders. Therefore, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote ought to pass on SB 227.

Sincerely,



Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

¹ The Ruderman White Paper on Mental Health and Suicide of First Responders, April 2018.

² Neil H. Vigil, Andrew R. Grant, Octavio Perez, Robyn N. Blust, Vatsal Chikani, Tyler F. Vadeboncoeur, Daniel W. Spaite & Bentley J. Bobrow (2019) Death by Suicide—The EMS Profession Compared to the General Public, *Prehospital Emergency Care*, 23:3, 340-345, DOI: [10.1080/10903127.2018.1514090](https://doi.org/10.1080/10903127.2018.1514090)

³ *Suicides Among First Responders: A Call to Action*, April 6, 2021, Hope M. Tiesman, PhD; Katherine L. Elkins, MPH; Melissa Brown, DrPH; Suzanne Marsh, MPA; and Leslie M. Carson, MPH, MSW

⁴ Blue H.E.L.P., <https://bluehelp.org/the-numbers/>

Reflecting on 40 Years: Continuing Our Journey to Hope, Help, and Health

NAMI New Hampshire • 85 North State Street • Concord, NH 03301

InfoLine: 800-242-6264 • Tel. 603-225-5359 • Fax 603-228-8848 • info@naminh.org / www.NAMINH.org