



February 7th, 2023

Honorable Chairman Rick Ladd
House Education Committee
LOB 205-207
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for HB 352

Dear Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sam Hawkins, and I am the Public Policy Assistant at NAMI NH, 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 HB 352, relative to excused absences due to a student's mental or behavioral health.

New Hampshire kids are facing a mental health emergency, the urgency of which cannot be overstated. 15,000 Granite Staters ages 12-17 have depression, and suicide is the second leading cause of death for NH youth and young adults ages 10 – 34. On a national level, one in six US youth ages 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year. Fifty-percent of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24.

Adolescence is a stressful and rapidly developing period of life, where youth learn to navigate their education, complex social and family situations, and begin to plan for their futures. While these are challenges for all youth, they're exponentially harder for youth with a mental health disorder, shown by the fact that high school students with depression are twice as likely to drop out of school than their peers.

Formally allowing excused absences for mental and behavioral health needs will help combat stress and address emotional struggles for students before they reach a crisis point. Additionally, it will provide time and freedom for students and families to pursue counseling and other assistance.

Find Help, Find Hope.

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This policy would encourage youth to take ownership and active accountability of their mental and behavioral health. By opening the discourse surrounding mental health and encouraging crucial dialogue between students, parents, and teachers, HB 352 could also work to reduce the stigma surrounding these disorders.

At least twelve other states have made the decision to support their youth experiencing mental illness by allowing these excused absences, and several other states are in the process of considering this policy. New Hampshire would benefit greatly from joining the change and taking this crucial step as soon as possible.

In standing committed to a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to addressing the youth mental health crisis, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote to recommend ought to pass for HB 352.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name below it.

Samuel C. Hawkins