



February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Honorable Chairman Rick Ladd  
House Education Committee  
Legislative Office Building 205-207  
N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for HB 451

Dear Chairman Ladd and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. 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 writing in support of HB 451, relative to the state board of education prohibition on discrimination.

Alongside the home, schools are one of the most important environments for a child, directly impacting their current and future wellbeing and success. As such, it is crucial we ensure that these spaces are safe, supportive, and accessible for every individual, regardless of their identity and characteristics. HB 451, which expands protections against discrimination in school admissions and educational programs, is an important measure in doing so.

In the US, 1 in 6 youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year, and in the Granite State, 15,000 individuals aged 12-17 live with depression. The impact of these disorders on educational outcomes is serious. High school students with depression are twice as likely to drop out as their peers. For LGBTQ+ youth, the situation is especially dire. The Trevor Project reported that, in 2022, 72% of LGBTQ+ youth in New Hampshire experienced symptoms of anxiety, 55% experienced symptoms of depression, and 39% seriously considered suicide.

Exposing these kids to discrimination and denying them access to a complete, fulfilling educational community and experience can only serve to worsen these conditions and harm

*Find Help, Find Hope.*

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their current and future wellbeing. Beyond establishing protections, this bill would also go a long way in reducing the stigma surrounding disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity, telling both these individuals and their communities that they are valued, accepted, and protected here in New Hampshire.

For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote Ought to Pass for HB 451.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Samuel C. Hawkins