



February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to HB 104

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 respond to HB 104, relative to multi-stall bathrooms and locker rooms in schools.

As introduced, HB 104 does not provide criteria for the determination or definition of sex for the separation of students into same-sex facilities. If, however, the intended purpose, or unintended consequence, of this bill would prevent transgender youth from accessing facilities aligning with their gender identity, NAMI NH stands in opposition.

There is an emerging body of research that shows that LGBTQ individuals, especially those who are transgender or gender-nonconforming, are at an elevated risk for experiencing anxiety and depression and are more likely to consider and attempt suicide than their heterosexual or cisgender peers. According to the Trevor Project, in 2022, 39% of LGBTQ youth in New Hampshire seriously considered suicide, and 10% attempted it. Beyond New Hampshire, a 2020 study in the Journal of Interpersonal Violence (JIV) found that 82% of transgender individuals across the US and Canada have considered suicide, and 40% have attempted it.

How can we best support these youth living at higher risk? Beyond medical care, the impact of an accepting community is paramount. The JIV study found that internalized stigma, emotional familial neglect, and lack of school belonging made a significant contribution to

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suicidality for transgender individuals. This data supports the premise that access to identity-affirming spaces is one of the most significant ways we can promote trans wellbeing. “Open representation,” the “presence of other LGBTQ people,” and “a welcoming environment” have been identified as some of the qualities that make a space affirming for LGBTQ youth. Yet in NH, these spaces are few and far between, as only 47% of LGBTQ youth in NH consider school an affirming space, and only 18% believe their community at large to be “very accepting.”

This bill could only serve to further restrict access to affirming spaces for trans youth. School, a crucial and developmental everyday environment, would further become a place where a child can no longer live fully in accordance with their identity. Where the number of affirming environments decreases, we expect anxiety, depression, and suicide will likely increase.

If HB 104 would result in restricted access for transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals, NAMI NH urges the committee to recommend inexpedient to legislate.

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