



March 7, 2023

Honorable Chairman Mark Pearson  
House Children and Family Law Committee  
Legislate Office Building Room 206  
North Main St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to HB 10

Dear Chairman Pearson 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 opposition to HB 10, establishing the parental bill of rights.

Over the past decade, already high suicide rates have been rising in the United States and in New Hampshire. Attached to this testimony is a chart detailing the leading causes of death in NH from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In this chart, you can see that the second leading cause of death for 10–24-year-old individuals is suicide.

In New Hampshire, 15,000 youth ages 12-17 have depression. Additionally, according to Health Affairs, between 2007 and 2018, suicide increased 57.4 percent in 10–24-year-olds. In one survey of high school students, one in three youth reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and one in five seriously considered suicide.<sup>1</sup> More precisely, results from the 2019 Youth Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System show that 18.8% of high school students seriously considered suicide and 8.9% attempted suicide.

Rates of mental health symptoms, suicidal thoughts and attempts are even more elevated in the LGBTQ community. According to the Trevor Project, in 2022, 72 % of LGBTQ youth in NH experienced symptoms of anxiety, 55% experienced symptoms of depression, 39% seriously considered suicide, and 10% attempted it.

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<sup>1</sup> "Understanding Suicide Risk And Prevention," Health Affairs Health Policy Brief, January 29, 2021.

*Find Help, Find Hope.*

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](mailto:info@naminh.org) / [www.NAMINH.org](http://www.NAMINH.org)

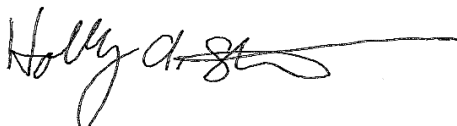
NAMI NH actively works with schools on suicide prevention through the NAMI NH Connect Suicide Prevention Program (Connect Program). By way of background, NAMI NH's Connect Program has been designated as a National Best Practice in suicide prevention, intervention and postvention and has trained in over 40 states, and 35 tribal nations. The program has also done briefings related to mental health and suicide prevention at the Pentagon, provided training for the Department of Defense (DOD) and presented in six countries. NAMI NH/Connect staff serve on numerous national and local workgroups and committees, including the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL), as well as New Hampshire's legislatively established Suicide Prevention Council.

As a part of the Connect Program, youth are encouraged to connect with a trusted adult if they are feeling sadness, hopelessness, or having thoughts of suicide. NAMI NH has a suggested protocol for school personnel to follow that elevates the safety of the child to the highest priority. It provides step by step instructions to follow depending on the circumstances and nature of the crisis.

The vague and confusing language on page 3 lines 16-19 of HB 10 could create a chilling effect for students in approaching school personnel when they or a friend are in crisis. It may also cause school personnel to pause and question what steps need to be taken to ensure safety. In a time when youth suicide rates are very high, NH needs to take any and all measures to prevent suicide deaths and suicide attempts. HB 10 legislatively creates an atmosphere in schools that discourages youth from seeking the assistance of a trusted adult, causes confusion for school personnel about what steps to take if a student comes to them in crisis, and is counter to the suicide prevention work that is being done within our state.

Simply put, certain provisions of HB 10 increases suicide risk among NH's youth. Therefore, NAMI NH respectfully urges the committee to recommend HB 10 inexpedient to legislate. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Sincerely,



Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

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