



March 7, 2023

Honorable Chair Ruth Ward  
Senate Education Committee  
Legislative Office Building Room 101  
North State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to SB 272

Dear Chair Ward 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 SB 272, establishing a parents' bill of rights in education.

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 NH high school students seriously considered suicide and 8.9% attempted suicide.

According to the US Center for Disease Control, LGBT youth represent a significant high risk sub-group as evidenced by a rate of suicide attempts four times greater for LGB youth and two times greater for questioning youth than that of straight youth. Additionally, suicide attempts by LGB youth and questioning youth are 4-6 times

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

*Find Help, Find Hope.*

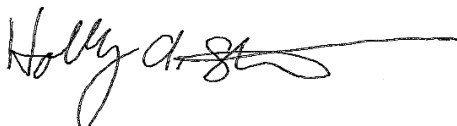
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more likely to result in injury, poisoning, or overdose that requires treatment from a doctor or nurse, compared to their straight peers. New Hampshire LGBTQ youth are no different; according to the Trevor Project, in 2022, 72 % of LGBTQ youth in NH reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety, 55% reported experiencing symptoms of depression, 39% seriously considered suicide, and 10% attempted it. Additionally, and more closely related to this bill, is that LGB youth who come from highly rejecting families are 8.4 times as likely to have attempted suicide as LGB peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection.

Faced with such drastic statistics, our urgent priority must be to ask how we can best support these individuals, and not call them out in legislation. We know that the impact of an accepting community is paramount in reducing suicide attempts and deaths. A 2020 study in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence (JIV)* found that the lack of school belonging, internalized stigma, and emotional familial neglect made a significant contribution to 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. Only 47% of LGBTQ youth in NH see school as an affirming space, and only 18% believe their community at large to be “very accepting.” SB 272, which singles out transgender youth, only serves to create a less welcoming and affirming environment for these kids in their schools.

The language contained on page 4 lines 17 through 25 is discriminatory on its face as applied to LGB youth and even more as applied to trans and non-binary youth. In a time when creating accepting and affirming spaces is paramount, this bill will further prevent LGBTQ youth from seeing their school as an affirming space. Therefore, NAMI NH strongly urges the committee to recommend inexpedient to legislate for SB 272.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Holly A. Stevens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

*Find Help, Find Hope.*

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