



March 13, 2023

Honorable Chair Regina Birdsell
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 101
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 116

Dear Chair 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 SB 116, relative to discharge from the secure psychiatric unit of the state prison.

In any medical treatment plan, including mental health treatment, continuity of care is essential. This truth is no different for incarcerated individuals. Those living within prison settings and with mental health conditions deserve equal access to quality, efficient care that prioritizes their progress towards healing. About 40% of people who are incarcerated have experienced a mental illness, which is about twice the prevalence of the overall adult population. However, receiving or continuing treatment through incarceration is difficult, harming outcomes in their health and in the incarceration environment. Given these facts, our corrections system has had to serve as a mental health system without the proper resources to do so, at great cost to all involved.¹

This bill clarifies and shifts responsibilities in the care of a patient from the Secure Psychiatric Unit (SPU) of the state prison from the Department of Corrections (DOC) to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) when an individual is transferred from the SPU to New Hampshire Hospital (NHH) This bill is a request of DHHS. It only

¹*Mental Health Treatment While Incarcerated*, NAMI, <https://www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities/Improving-Health/Mental-Health-Treatment-While-Incarcerated>

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makes sense that treatment team members involved in the direct care of the patient are the ones making treatment decisions. Under the current system, even though a person is a patient at NHH, if they were transferred from the SPU, the treatment team at the SPU retains the responsibility of all treatment decisions. This set up creates a lag in appropriate and timely care of these individuals. This request signifies a laudable endeavor by DHHS to accept and maintain responsibility for these patients and their health outcomes, contributing to the state's broader efforts in successfully caring for Granite Staters living with mental illness.

For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to recommend Ought to Pass for SB 116.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Samuel C. Hawkins