



January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Honorable Chair Robert Lynn  
House Judiciary Committee  
Legislative Office Building 206-208  
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition of HB 396

Dear Chair 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 speak in opposition of HB 396, relative to state recognition of biological sex.

Suicide in New Hampshire is a matter of great urgency. The tragic human and economic impact cannot be overstated. In the Granite State, suicide is the second leading cause of death for individuals ages 10-34, the third leading cause for ages 35- 44, and the fourth for ages 45-54. It is an issue that can affect any of us. Today specifically, however, we're here to speak to a small yet important subgroup within this data.

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.

Faced with such drastic statistics, our urgent priority must be to ask how we can best support these individuals. We know that undergoing hormone therapy or gender affirming surgery decreases the likelihood of psychological distress. But in addition to medical treatment, the impact of an accepting community is paramount. The JIV study 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-

*Find Help, Find Hope.*

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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.”

This bill only serves to further restrict affirming spaces for the trans community. Through restricting access to community based on gender assignment at birth, this bill sends the clear message to transgender and gender non-conforming individuals that they are not accepted or supported. Team sports, athletic competitions, and everyday environments like bathrooms and locker rooms could become places where an individual can no longer live fully in accordance with their identity. When the number of affirming environments decreases, anxiety, depression, and suicide will likely increase.

Introducing and considering bills like this is harmful, regardless of whether they become law. Last year, 80% of LGBTQ youth in New Hampshire reported that recent politics have negatively impacted their well-being. This data makes it clear that not only the outcomes, but the very act of calling these individuals’ rights into question, will cause harm.

In standing committed to reducing harm and serving the well-being of our community, NAMI NH urges the committee vote inexpedient to legislate for HB 396.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'S'.

Samuel C. Hawkins