



March 28, 2023

Honorable Chair Mark Pearson
House Children and Family Law Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 206
North State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support of SB 179 as amended by the Senate

Dear Chair 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 support of SB 179 as amended by the Senate, relative to eliminating the use of seclusion as a form of punishment or discipline on children in schools and treatment facilities.

Seclusion is akin to solitary confinement and can be extremely traumatic for a child. According to the U.S. Department of Education, “[p]hysical restraint or seclusion should not be used except in situations where the child’s behavior poses imminent danger of serious physical harm to self or others and other interventions are ineffective and should be discontinued as soon as imminent danger of serious physical harm to self or others has dissipated.” Absent from this recommendation is the use of seclusion as a punishment because that is dangerous, wholly inappropriate, and should never be done. Despite this, seclusion is still being used in an attempt to correct disruptive and problematic behaviors at schools and facilities in our state.

NAMI National has also weighed in on the use of seclusion and has stated, “it is widely accepted by mental health professionals that [seclusion and restraint] use is [a] traumatizing practice. Studies in mental health inpatient settings show that the use of seclusion and restraints can result in psychological harm, physical injuries and even death to both the people subjected to and the staff applying these methods.”

Seclusion is more widely used against students with disabilities (including social emotional disturbance/mental illness), but it is important to note that it is ineffective

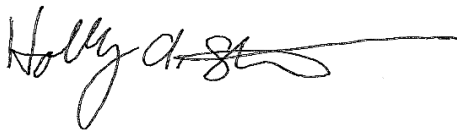
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in reducing students' negative or problematic behaviors. Policymakers should focus efforts on encouraging engagement-based interventions, early identification and linkages to care, school-linked mental health services, and integrated access to the community's crisis continuum of care, instead of allowing schools and facilities to rely on the harmful practice of seclusion.

In sum, seclusion is a dangerous practice that can cause trauma and has been shown to be wholly ineffective in reducing challenging behavior. Seclusion should never be used unless there are safety concerns. It should never be used as a punishment. Therefore, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote ought to pass on SB 179 as amended by the Senate. I am available to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Holly A. Stevens", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

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