



April 18, 2023

Honorable Chairman Rick Ladd
House Education Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 207
North State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to SB 272

Dear Chairman Ladd 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.¹ More precisely, results from the 2021 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (YRBS) show that 24.7% (nearly one fourth) of NH high school students seriously considered suicide, 19.3% made a plan for suicide, and 9.8% attempted suicide in the 12 months preceding the survey. These are a significant increase over the 2019 numbers.²

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

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

² 2019 YRBS data- 18.4% seriously considered suicide; 13.3% made a plan for suicide; and 7.0% attempted in the twelve months preceding the survey.

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 / www.NAMINH.org

LGB youth and two times greater for questioning youth than that of straight youth. 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. Further, 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. We must ask how we can best support these individuals, 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, and may potentially expose them to dangerous familial rejection

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. Crucially, these procedures do include the parents at high levels of concern.

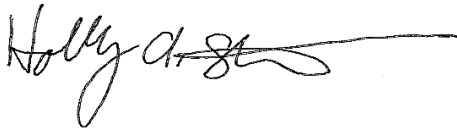
Find Help, Find Hope.

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 / www.NAMINH.org

The language contained on page 4 lines 17 through 25 could create a chilling effect for all students in approaching school personnel when they or a friend are in crisis. It may also disconnect educators from their system of support and paralyze them when questioning 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. SB272 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.

The bill's language in these sections 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 and potentially expose them to increased danger within the home. Simply put, certain provisions of SB 272 increase suicide risk among all NH's youth by destroying the notion of a "trusted adult" within the schools. Therefore, NAMI NH respectfully urges the committee to recommend SB 272 inexpedient to legislate. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Sincerely,

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

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

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 / www.NAMINH.org