



May 2, 2023

Honorable Chairman James Gray
Senate Finance Committee
State House Room 103
North Main St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH testimony on HB 1 and HB 2

Dear Chairman Gray 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 testify on HB 1 and HB 2, making appropriations for the expenses of certain departments of the state for fiscal years ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

It's no secret that New Hampshire is amid a mental health crisis, exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic. Local and national data indicate during the past two years there have been significant increases in stress, anxiety, and depression across all ages, though particularly impacting one of our most vulnerable populations: children and youth. The most visible symptom of this broad crisis is the emergency department boarding of individuals in a mental health crisis while awaiting an inpatient bed. On any given day, there are upwards of 60 individuals who are ready to discharge from New Hampshire Hospital (NHH), but are unable to do so as there is simply no place for them to go. In addition to lengthy waits for inpatient beds, Granite Staters are waiting months for an initial outpatient mental health appointment.

One of the root causes of these long wait times is New Hampshire's workforce shortage crisis. As a result, people needing mental health treatment have difficulty accessing services that will support them in their community, allowing them to get the right treatment at the right place, and at the right time. When individuals have adequate community-based services, they are less likely to need costly inpatient care to manage their mental illness.

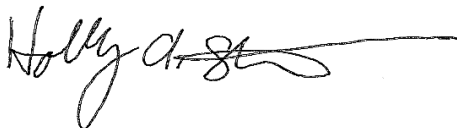
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Another issue exacerbating the mental health crisis is the lack of appropriate and affordable housing in our state. New Hampshire is in need of step-up and step-down units; supportive housing; residential treatment facilities; and additional individual and single family housing units. Through adequate housing opportunities, people would be better equipped to discharge from NHH, opening up capacity and thus reducing the number of people boarding in ERs.

While there has been significant investment and much accomplished in the implementation of NH's 10 Year Mental Health Plan, we know that it is vital that we expand and enhance that work to address the needs of all Granite Staters impacted by mental illness and suicide. It is imperative that this budget address the mental health crisis, the workforce shortage, and the lack of appropriate and affordable housing. NAMI NH urges the Committee to increase Medicaid rates and provide adequate funding for the following: intensive reentry services; additional inpatient bed capacity; step-up and step-down units; telephone, mobile, and stabilization crisis services; supportive housing; residential treatment programs; affordable housing; and workforce development programs. Only a comprehensive approach will fully address the mental health crisis that Granite Staters are currently facing.

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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