

January 9, 2024

Honorable Chairman Mark Pearson
House Children and Family Law Committee
Legislate Office Building Room 206-208
North State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support of HB 1199

Dear Chairman 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 HB 1199, relative to services of the office of the child advocate for youth experiencing homelessness and making an appropriation therefor.

Lack of access to safe, stable housing has a profoundly negative impact on an individual's mental health, especially for youth. As a result, suicide has been found to be the leading cause of death in youth experiencing homelessness. Multiple protective and risk factors have been linked to the concept of resilience, which is understood to be the capacity of individuals to cope successfully with significant change. Protective factors include social connectedness, religiosity, social support, internal locus of control, and positive emotionality. "Qualities often associated with resilience, often referred as 'street smarts,' tend to appear as homeless individuals learn where to find resources, who to trust while on the street, and social structures..."¹

In New Hampshire, it is estimated that almost 15,000 youth will experience some form of homelessness this year. HB 1199 would establish a position within the Office of Child Advocate (OCA) to identify and oversee existing programs and services to support youth experiencing homelessness, and develop a directory of services that includes mental and behavioral health care. Having these resources available for youth

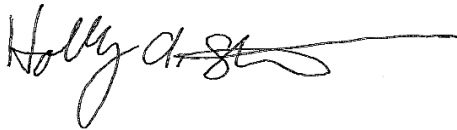
¹ Yuri Flach, Timothy S. Razza, Suicidality in homeless children and adolescents: A systematic review, Aggression and Violent Behavior, ScienceDirect, Volume 64, 2022.

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experiencing homelessness will increase the protective factors in their lives and thus, reduce their risk for suicide.

The OCA is a good place to develop this new position and program as it currently works directly with youth and young adults and has the ability to oversee all system components and identify gaps and strengths within it. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee recommend ought to pass on HB 1199.

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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