



January 16, 2024

Honorable Chairman Kevin Avard
Senate Energy and Natural Resources
State House Room 103
107 North Main St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 387

Dear Chair Avard 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 favor of SB 387, relative to a state parks pass pilot program for recovery centers and community health centers. It is our understanding that this bill should have included the Community Mental Health Centers. Our testimony is offered based on this understanding.

One in five adults and one in six youth aged 6-17 experience a mental illness each year in New Hampshire. This equates to 221,000 individuals in the Granite State who are directly impacted by a mental health condition, with 57,000 adults living with a serious mental illness (SMI). In 2021, nearly 40% of adults in New Hampshire reported symptoms of anxiety or depression. Of those experiencing a mental illness, 70,000 adults in New Hampshire did not receive the mental health care they needed.

Research overwhelmingly shows that outdoor nature-based activities improve mental health outcomes across all populations, “including older adults with long-term conditions and people with common mental health problems and SMI, as well as healthy adults.”¹ Studies have found that nature-based interventions, including forest therapies with an emphasis in immersion in nature, had a significant effect in the reduction of symptoms for depression and anxiety.²

¹ Coventry PA, Brown JE, Pervin J, Brabyn S, Pateman R, Breedvelt J, Gilbody S, Stancliffe R, McEachan R, White PL. Nature-based outdoor activities for mental and physical health: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *SSM Popul Health*. 2021 Oct 1;16:100934. doi: 10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100934. PMID: 34646931; PMCID: PMC8498096.

² Ibid.

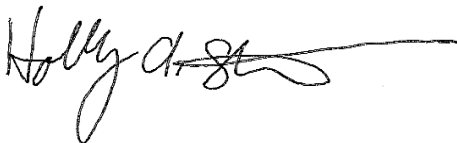
Find Help, Find Hope.

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

There are 10 Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in New Hampshire. In 2022, the CMHCs served over 60,000 unique individuals in our state. The CMHCs primarily serve as the safety net in their communities for those children and adults being treated for mental illness or emotional disorders. In FY 2022, 70% of the CMHCs' revenues were for Medicaid enrollees, many of which have severe and persistent mental illness.³ Many of the individuals being served by the CMHCs have social security disability income (SSDI) or supplemental security income (SSI) as their only source of income. As a result, they have very little money left over every month for items such as entertainment.

Knowing that many of the people receiving services at the CMHCs would be unable to afford the admission fees to our wonderful state parks and knowing that the research shows a strong correlation between nature and the reduction of mental health symptoms, SB 387 would have a positive impact for those receiving services at the CMHCs. Therefore, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote ought to pass on SB 387.

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.

³ 2022 Community Behavioral Health Association Annual report

Find Help, Find Hope.