



January 3, 2024

Honorable Chair Regina Birdsell
Senate Health and Human Services
Legislate Office Building Room 101
North Main St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 411

Dear Chair Birdsell 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 411, relative to emergency mental health services for persons 21 years of age and younger.

Both locally and nationally, our community continues to experience a mental health crisis. Coming out of the pandemic, 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 is emergency department boarding of individuals in a mental health crisis while waiting for an inpatient bed.

High-fidelity wraparound services, known as FAST (Families and Systems Together) Forward are intensive family-focused services that can prevent the necessity for hospitalization when children or youth are experiencing serious emotional and behavioral concerns. It is an evidenced-based program that provides youth and family-driven wraparound services that are focused on keeping the child/youth in their home community. The goals of wraparound services are to help families and youth identify their strengths and their needs, then to develop a plan that connects them to supports (some formal, some natural) and services in their communities. As a provider of family peer support services through this program, NAMI NH can attest first-hand to its positive impact.

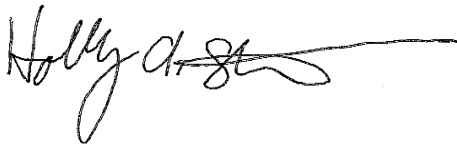
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Currently, private insurance carriers do not cover Fast Forward wraparound services in New Hampshire. Despite not having coverage through their private carriers, families can still access FAST Forward at the expense of NH taxpayers with funding through the NH's Bureau of Children's Behavioral Health and through Medicaid. Referrals for these services can come from a variety of sources, some of whom may not be aware of the funding available through the department. Therefore, there may be hesitancy to make referrals knowing that a family's health insurance will not cover the services, and knowing the family does not qualify for Medicaid if the child has never been hospitalized. Rather than waiting for the child to be sick enough for hospitalization, if commercial insurance covered these services, they could be started earlier on, potentially alleviating the need for a hospitalization. Additionally, if the burden for the costs of these services no longer rested on the Bureau of Children's Behavioral Health, those funds could be reallocated to support the System of Care in other areas.

SB 411 ensures that these essential mental health services are covered by all commercial insurance carriers to meet the needs of New Hampshire's most vulnerable children. Therefore, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote ought to pass on SB 411.

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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