

1/3/24

Honorable Chair Regina Birdsell
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 101
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 499

Dear Chair Birdsell and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Sam Hawkins, and I am the Public Policy Assistant at NAMI NH, 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 writing in support of SB 499, relative to reduction of hunger for children, older adults, and people with disabilities.

A variety of complex factors contribute to an individual's mental health and wellbeing. These factors include housing, education, social inclusion, and more, but one key determinant is food security and hunger. In children especially, the connection between hunger and mental health is clear. A study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that severe hunger is "associated with higher reported anxiety/depression among school-aged children," including reported rates of anxiety nearly double that of children with no hunger.¹ For children without adequate access to food, schools have a crucial role to play in providing for their physical and mental wellness.

SB 499 takes important steps to address hunger and protect the mental health of school-aged children by expanding free and reduced-price meals and aiding eligible families over the summer with the implementation of a summer electronic benefits transfer program. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to recommend OTP for SB 499.

Sincerely,

Samuel C. Hawkins



¹Linda Weinreb, Cheryl Wehler, Jennifer Perloff, Richard Scott, David Hosmer, Linda Sagor, Craig Gundersen; Hunger: Its Impact on Children's Health and Mental Health. *Pediatrics* October 2002; 110 (4): e41. 10.1542/peds.110.4.e41

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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