

February 2, 2024

Honorable Chairman Terry Roy
House Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 202-204
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for HB 1050

Chairman Roy and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. 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 here today to speak in support of HB 1050, relative to establishing a voluntary waiver of the right to purchase a firearm.

When an individual is experiencing a mental health crisis, limiting their access to lethal means is a crucial step in preventing suicide and saving lives. 90% of individuals who attempt suicide do not go on to die by suicide later.¹ Attempts with a firearm, however, present a particularly high risk of lethality, with approximately 85% of attempts with a firearm being fatal.¹ Firearms are the most common method used in suicide attempts², and suicide deaths make up the majority of all gun deaths. In New Hampshire, 88% of all gun deaths are suicides, compared to 57% nationally.³

HB1050 offers a straightforward policy to help prevent suicide by putting agency in the hands of the individual. When folks who live with a mental health condition or regularly experience suicidal ideation are doing well, they may recognize their potential to be a danger to themselves in the future. In these situations, allowing an individual to put distance between themselves and lethal means, in this case firearms, has the potential to reduce suicide deaths.

¹*Means Matter*, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health:
<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/>

²*Suicide Data and Statistics*, CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/suicide-data-statistics.html>

³*New Hampshire*, EveryStat: <https://everystat.org/#NewHampshire>

Similar to an advanced directive for healthcare decisions, this policy is a mechanism by which individuals can formally communicate their wishes for when their decision making may be later impaired. In many instances, individuals already take similar steps to protect themselves in instances of suicide risk, such as asking their loved ones to take possession of their firearms or other lethal means when they feel their mental health declining. This bill is one more tool in that crucial toolbox.

HB1050 is thoughtful and balanced policy that respects the agency, rights, and privacy of those who choose to utilize it, and could save lives. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to recommend OTP for HB1050.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Samuel C. Hawkins

Find Help, Find Hope.

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