

February 5, 2024

Honorable Chairman Rick Ladd
House Education Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 205-207
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to HB1185

Chairman Ladd 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 opposition to HB1185, relative to sexual education instruction.

NAMI NH believes that freedom from stigma and discrimination is crucial to mental wellness. Largely due to how they are mistreated in society, LGBTQ+ individuals often experience anxiety and depression, and are more likely to consider and attempt suicide than their heterosexual or cisgender peers.^{1,2} Acceptance, support, and affirmation within one's community plays a key role in mental health and is crucial to supporting the mental wellness of LGBTQ+ youth. "Open representation," the "presence of other LGBTQ people," and "a welcoming environment" have been identified as some of the qualities that make a space affirming for LGBTQ young people in NH. HB1185, by prohibiting discussion of gender identity and sexual orientation, works against the goal of making schools an affirming and accepting environment for LGBTQ+ youth.

¹Mental Health By the Numbers, NAMI, <https://www.nami.org/mhstats>

²2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People, *The Trevor Project*, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/assets/static/05_TREVOR05_2023survey.pdf

³2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Mental Health New Hampshire, *The Trevor Project*, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Trevor-Project-2022-National-Survey-on-LGBTQ-Youth-Mental-Health-by-State-New-Hampshire.pdf>

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Further, I want to emphasize that considering anti-LGBTQ policies is damaging, whether or not they pass into law. According to the Trevor Project, in 2023, “nearly 1 in 3 LGBTQ young people said their mental health was poor most of the time or always due to anti-LGBTQ policies and legislation.”² It is crucial that our policies promote mental wellness and create accepting, affirming environments, rather than limit them.

For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote ITL for HB1185.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Samuel C. Hawkins

²2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People, *The Trevor Project*, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/assets/static/05_TREVOR05_2023survey.pdf

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