

February 5, 2024

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

RE: NAMI NH Opposition of HB 1473

Dear Chairman Ladd 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 writing in opposition to HB 1473, relative to social-emotional learning in public schools.

It's no secret that we are amid a youth mental health crisis, both locally and nationally. In 2022, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the US Surgeon General all declared that our youth are facing a mental health emergency. In New Hampshire there are increased numbers of youth boarding in emergency departments awaiting an inpatient bed while experiencing a mental health crisis. There are increased numbers of youth seeking assistance from community-based mental health providers and finding themselves facing months' long waits for initial appointments. Youth are reporting greater instances of anxiety, depression, and thoughts of self-harm. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Granite State youth and young adults ages 10 – 34. One in six US youth ages 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year, and 15,000 Granite Staters ages 12-17 have depression. According to the most recent YRBS data, more than 44% of students reported feeling sad or hopeless about themselves in 2021, which is a substantial increase compared to 34% in 2019.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as an integral part of education and human development. "SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy

Find Help, Find Hope.

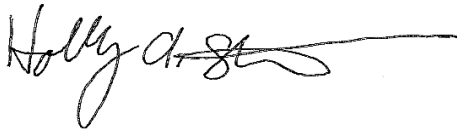
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for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. The research demonstrates that an education that promotes SEL has a positive impact on a wide range of outcomes, including academic performance, healthy relationships, mental wellness, and more.”¹

SEL is increasingly recognized as playing a critical role in the promotion of positive mental health and the prevention of mental health disorders among children and youth. It promotes positive development that forms the foundation of mental well-being for all students. It assists students in developing skills to manage emotions and behavior thus developing self-esteem and confidence. Integrating SEL into teaching practices “will not only enhance social and emotional skills in the individual child, but will also help to create safe and supportive environments in which all children feel they belong, reduce the stigma of mental health difficulties, and encourage help-seeking when children need it, promoting mental well-being in all children.”²

For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee recommend inexpedient to legislate on HB 1473.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Holly A. Stevens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

¹ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>

² The University of British Columbia, Social & Emotional Learning Resource Finder, <http://www.selresources.com/sel-and-mental-health/>

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