



February 2, 2024

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

Good morning, Chairman Roy and Members of the Committee:

My name is Susan Stearns and I serve as the Executive Director of NAMI New Hampshire (the National Alliance on Mental Illness). I am a resident of Sanbornton and have family members who live with serious mental illness. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am here to offer testimony in cautious support of HB 1711.

There are several key provisions in the bill that we feel are critical to preventing discrimination and protecting the civil liberties of people living with mental illness as well as helping to ensure the safety of both individuals and law enforcement.

According to the National Institute on Mental Health, one in five Americans lives with a mental illness. Given this, it is critical that the language in the bill limits who would be prevented from purchasing a firearm to individuals who have been found to be a danger to themselves or others after a probate commitment hearing, and to people found not competent to stand trial who have also been found to be dangerous to themselves or others.

In addition, there are several provisions in the bill that are essential to its fair and appropriate implementation. These include that:

- the report to the National Instant Crime Background System (NICS) be made by law enforcement or the judicial branch in order to protect the therapeutic relationship between patient and provider;
- there is a process by which a person can petition the court for relief and to have their rights restored; and
- any removal of firearms should be done in a way that limits the engagement of the individuals and law enforcement in order to avoid dangerous confrontations.

The reality is that for many people the initial diagnosis of a mental illness is a crisis. Yet treatment works and making sure that people understand there is help and hope is a critical part of the recovery process. As introduced, this bill helps ensure that people who have been determined to be a danger to themselves or others do not have access to firearms when they are

Find Help, Find Hope.

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

unwell yet does not permanently deny them a constitutional right and offers the promise of recovery and the ability to live a full life in their community.

On behalf of the nearly 44,000 folks we serve each year, we ask that you ensure that any bill related to this matter on which you vote “ought to pass,” addresses the concerns we have raised and protects the rights of Granite Staters living with mental illness.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan L. Stearns". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S' and a decorative flourish at the end.

Susan L. Stearns
Executive Director