



April 18, 2024

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 HB 1168

Dear Chair Birdsell 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 1168, establishing a committee to study the impact of the housing crisis on people with disabilities.

Access to safe, stable, affordable housing is a critical social determinant of health, with a direct impact on an individual's overall physical and mental wellbeing. For all people, housing instability can lead to stress, anxiety, and other negative mental health outcomes. When our basic needs are not met, it becomes difficult to maintain all aspects of our health and wellness, including our mental health. This is especially true for individuals with a serious mental illness, for whom access to appropriate housing that meets their specific needs is a key factor of getting and staying well.

While housing has a direct impact on mental health, the inverse is also true: having a serious mental illness can also directly impact one's ability to get or maintain housing. The barriers to stable housing for individuals with a mental illness are complex and varied, including experiences with discrimination in the rental process, trouble affording the costs of housing, and a lack of available housing with the proper supports that they need. This instability can lead to interruptions in care, negative mental health outcomes, and experiences with homelessness.

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When individuals with a serious mental illness have access to stable, affordable housing that meets their needs, it becomes easier to access treatments to get and stay well, supporting recovery and helping to prevent hospitalizations, homelessness, and involvement with the justice system. It is crucial that we take a hard look at how the housing crisis in our state affects individuals with disabilities, including those with serious mental illness, so that we can learn best how to invest in and support our community.

For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote Ought to Pass for HB 1168.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and a long, sweeping underline.

Samuel C. Hawkins