

April 23, 2024

Honorable Chair Sharon Carson
Senate Judiciary Committee
State House Room 100
107 North Maine Street, Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to HB 1573 as amended by the House

Dear Chair Carson 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 today in opposition to HB 1573, relative to oversight of and criteria for residential placement of children as it was amended by the House.

In August 2023, the Office of Child Advocate (OCA) issued a briefing regarding concerns about an out-of-state residential facility in Tennessee, Bledsoe Youth Academy (BYA), where two NH children had been placed and were residing. The OCA toured the facility and interviewed the children, finding deplorable conditions and treatment of the children. The OCA recommended the immediate return of the two children to New Hampshire along with other certification and oversight parameters. This visit to BYA by the OCA made it clear that our state needs to have better oversight of any placement facility where New Hampshire children are residing.

In September 2022, according to an Office of the Child Advocate report, 1,169 New Hampshire youth were placed with other family members, in a foster home, or at group and residential facilities. Research has found that “compared with siblings who remained at home, children placed out-of-home had an increased risks of violence, antisocial behavior, low education, common psychiatric disorders, depression or premature mortality by either suicide or injury in adulthood.” It further found that “a foster home is better than an institution and that having a one-and-only stable placement is important for children’s stability and well-being in adulthood.”¹ Children

¹ Chris Gilbert, M.D., Ph.D., What Is the Impact of Out-of-Home Placements for Children?, Psychology Today, November 3, 2021

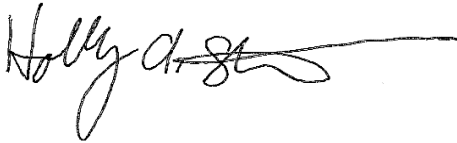
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have much better developmental and mental health outcomes when treatment is provided as close to their family and community of origin as possible where family connections can be preserved. Additionally, as referenced above, they also experience better health and social outcomes when out-of-home placements are not in institutional settings.

HB 1573, as introduced and passed by the House Children and Family Law Committee, revised criteria for the out-of-home placement of children and increased oversight and certification criteria for out-of-state residential treatment programs, which NAMI NH welcomes and applauds. The bill as amended by House Finance stripped out all the policy language, replacing it with a simple appropriation to the Department of Health and Human Services with no direction for how it should be used. NAMI NH believes that this approach is insufficient to ensure the best outcomes for youth in out-of-home placements and urges the committee to amend the bill to include the policy provisions originally contained in the bill.

Sincerely,

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

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

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