

April 16, 2024

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

RE: NAMI NH Cautious Support for HB 1711

Dear Chair Carson and Members of the Committee:

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 here today to offer testimony in cautious support of HB 1711, authorizing the state to report mental health data for firearms background check purposes and providing for processes for confiscation of firearms following certain mental health-related court proceedings and for relief from mental health-related firearms disabilities.

There are several key provisions in the bill that we feel are critical to preventing discrimination, protecting the civil liberties of people living with mental illness, and ensuring the safety of both the individual 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 and possessing 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 we believe are essential to its fair and appropriate implementation. These include that:

Find Help, Find Hope.

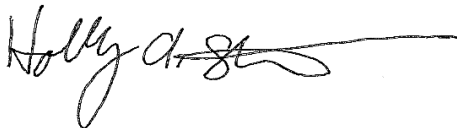
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- the report to the National Instant Crime Background System (NICS) be made by law enforcement or the judicial branch, not a provider, in order to protect the therapeutic relationship;
- there is a process by which a person can petition the court for relief and to have their rights restored; and
- any removal of firearms should be done in a way that limits engagement between the individual and law enforcement to avoid dangerous confrontations.

For many people, the initial diagnosis of a mental illness is during a crisis. Yet treatment works and making sure that people understand that 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 unwell, yet does not permanently deny them a constitutional right, instead offering 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.

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.

Find Help, Find Hope.

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