



April 25, 2024

Honorable Chair Sharon Carson  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
State House Room 100  
107 N Main St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to HB396

Dear Chair Carson 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 opposition to HB 396, permitting classification of individuals based on biological sex under certain limited circumstances.

NAMI NH believes that freedom from discrimination is integral to mental wellness. NH continues to experience a mental health crisis, especially impacting our youth and young adults. For LGBTQ+ young people, the effects of this crisis are especially startling. LGBTQ+ young people, including those who are transgender or nonbinary, often experience negative mental health outcomes, including high rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidality. Crucial to addressing this crisis, however, is understanding its cause.

Acceptance and support within one's community plays a key role in mental health. In part, our mental health reflects our environments and the conditions within which we live: who and what we interact with, how we are treated, and whether we can live as our authentic selves. Within all aspects of one's life, at home, at work or school, and in one's interests, it is crucial that one can live fully and freely in accordance with their identity. For transgender and nonbinary individuals, due to stigma and discrimination, this personhood is often denied, and they are forced to live as someone they are not. There is not an intrinsic link between one's existence as an LGBTQ+ person and poor mental health. Rather, it is these direct experiences with stigma and discrimination that ultimately contribute to the negative mental health outcomes LGBTQ+ individuals often experience. When our

*Find Help, Find Hope.*

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LGBTQ+ community members are accepted and supported for who they are, they experience better mental health outcomes.

Our policies should promote mental wellness and create accepting, affirming environments for everyone. HB 396 would do just the opposite, severely limiting the environments in New Hampshire in which transgender and nonbinary individuals can live freely. NAMI NH has grave concerns that this would have a negative effect on the mental health of trans and nonbinary individuals across the state, an effect that is, in part, already being seen across the nation. According to the Trevor Project, in 2023, nearly 1 in 3 LGBTQ young people said their mental health was poor most of the time or always due to anti-LGBTQ policies and legislation.

To ensure mental health for all, our policies must ensure freedom for all. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to recommend ITL for HB 396.

Sincerely,

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

Samuel C. Hawkins