

April 10, 2024

Honorable Chair Carol McGuire
House Executive Departments and Administration Committee
Legislative Office Building Rooms 306-308
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 367

Dear Chair McGuire 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 SB 367, reestablishing the commission to study the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder in first responders.

Both within our state and nationally, we continue to face a persistent mental health crisis. In New Hampshire, 221,000 adults have a mental health condition, and suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 15-34. Mental health and suicide ripple throughout our community, but for our first responders, the impact can be especially grave.

The difficulty of the situations first responders often face cannot be understated. These brave folks are usually the first to arrive at difficult and often dangerous scenes, dealing directly with all sorts of tragedies that may have a direct impact on their own physical and mental health and wellbeing. In the course of their essential work, first responders are often directly exposed to grief and pain— not only that of the community, but also their own. An estimated 30% of first responders develop a behavioral health condition, such as depression and posttraumatic stress disorder. Further, while research is limited, emerging data suggests that the risk of suicide and suicidal ideation is elevated for first responders.

¹ *Disaster Technical Assistance Center Supplemental Research Bulletin First Responders: Behavioral Health Concerns, Emergency Response, and Trauma*, SAMSHA (2018)

Find Help, Find Hope.

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NAMI NH applauds the previous accomplishments of the commission as well as the effort to continue its work through this legislation, and is glad to be a named member of the commission. Through the re-establishment of this commission, New Hampshire has the opportunity to continue to study this issue, implement changes to enable our full understanding of how PTSD and suicide impact our first responders, and invent and improve methods to support some of our state's bravest citizens. Our first responders provide a crucial service to our communities, and it is our responsibility to support them so that they may continue their important work and live happy, full lives.

For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to recommend OTP for SB 367.

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