



April 10, 2024

Honorable Chairman Wayne MacDonald
House Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 205-207
33 North State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 403

Dear Chairman MacDonald 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 here today to speak in favor of SB 403, relative to the health care workforce.

Workforce shortages continue to challenge New Hampshire as a whole; however, the impact is especially grave on the state's healthcare workforce, greatly affecting access to care for patients in need. We know that when individuals with mental illness receive the right services, at the right place, at the right time, fewer folks will end up homeless, hospitalized, and/or incarcerated, all of which cost the state far more than providing community-based services. However, more than half of people with a mental health condition in the U.S. did not receive any treatment last year, including 70,000 adults in New Hampshire.

Community health workers (CHWs) are lay-members of the community who work with the local health care system in underserved urban and rural environments with primarily marginalized populations. CHWs employ a deep understanding of the communities they work with, often sharing language, socioeconomic status, and lived experience. Since CHWs typically reside in the community they serve, they have the unique ability to bring information where it is needed most. They can reach community residents where they live, eat, play, work, and worship. CHWs are frontline agents of change, helping to reduce health disparities in underserved communities. One population that CHWs work with is those experiencing homelessness. Based on HUD data from 2021, 29.5% of people experiencing homelessness in New Hampshire have a serious mental health condition. For these

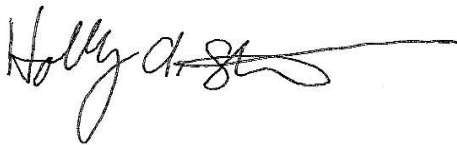
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communities in need, CHWs offer interpretation and translation services, provide culturally appropriate health education and information, give informal counseling and guidance, and advocate for individual and community health needs, all with the goal of helping people get the care that they need for their physical and mental health.

Voluntary certification and regulation of CHWs will lead to the ability to bill for the services CHWs provide and would in turn lead to the ability of organizations to hire more CHWs. Having more CHWs on the frontlines helping individuals navigate the system will lead to more people being connected to the services they need. Given the mental health workforce challenges currently facing the Granite State, SB 403 is a step forward in addressing this issue. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote SB 403 ought to pass.

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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