

April 23, 2024

Honorable Chairman Mark Pearson
House Children and Family Law Committee
Legislative Office Building 206-208
33 North State Street, Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 417

Dear Chairman Pearson 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 417, relative to out-of-home placements for children.

In September 2022, according to an Office of the Child Advocate report, 1,169 youth were placed with other family members, in a foster home, or at group and residential facilities in New Hampshire. 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

SB 417 revises criteria for out-of-home placement of children under the Child Protection Act and other juvenile statutes and establishes an order of preference based on placement with the child's siblings when possible, and proximity to the child's community of origin. Children 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-

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

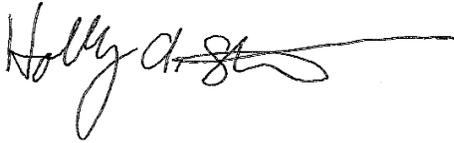
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of-home placements are not in institutional settings. SB 417 promotes better mental health outcomes for NH's youth requiring out-of-home placements.

Therefore, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote ought to pass on SB 417

Sincerely,

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

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

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