



January 23, 2025

Honorable Chair Diane Pauer
House Municipal and County Government Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 301
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to HB 348

Chair Pauer 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 testifying in opposition to HB 348, relative to eligibility for local assistance.

HB 348 allows municipalities to establish a residency requirement of up to 90 days for local welfare assistance with strict requirements on documents to prove residency. Despite the apparent intent of this bill to protect municipalities from providing for individuals who have never resided in their community, it will have severe unintended consequences. This bill will render many individuals with a mental illness leaving treatment or jail, as well as individuals experiencing homelessness, unable to access certain local assistance.

Every day in New Hampshire, individuals with serious mental illness are discharged from mental health treatment facilities, including designated receiving facilities and New Hampshire Hospital, with no place to live. Many have been hospitalized involuntarily and did not have any choice about what facility they ended up at. Many lose their housing while inpatient, and upon discharge have no place to go. Under HB 348, these individuals would not be able to seek local general assistance in the town or city they were hospitalized in, nor the town or city they originally came from. Without such

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assistance, which can include financial support for housing, medications, and more, many individuals living with mental health conditions may find themselves stuck in a cycle of homelessness, incarceration, and/or hospitalization.

In addition to individuals who are hospitalized, those held in jail who are not competent to stand trial can also be negatively impacted if HB 348 were to go forward. NAMI NH recently heard from a mother whose adult child was released after a year of incarceration from Valley Street jail in Manchester with only three days' worth of medication. He had been found not competent to stand trial due to his mental illness and was not restored within the one-year time frame allowed under law. He was never convicted of a crime; he never had the opportunity to have his day in court due to competency not being restored. Under HB 348, this young man would not even be able to go to Manchester City Hall to seek assistance in getting a longer supply of the medication necessary for this mental illness because he would have no way to prove residency.

As drafted, HB 348 will have many unintended consequences that will disproportionately affect those with a mental health condition, leaving them with no option to receive local general assistance for medications or housing. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote HB 348 inexpedient to legislate.

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.