



January 22, 2025

Honorable Chairman Glenn Cordelli  
House Education Policy and Administration Committee  
Legislative Office Building Rooms 205-207  
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Testimony on HB 384

Chairman Cordelli and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. 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 writing with concerns regarding HB 384, prohibiting bullying in schools, as introduced.

NAMI NH recognizes the impact that bullying has on mental health, and believes that schools should take a considered approach to addressing bullying by creating a positive environment that considers the needs of all involved and promotes a culture of support and rehabilitation throughout the wider school community. Such policies must not criminalize youth, lead to increased justice involvement, or disproportionately impact underserved youth. With this goal in mind, NAMI NH has significant concerns with HB 384 as drafted.

As introduced, this bill creates a punitive system rather than proactively addressing the factors that may lead to instances of bullying through cultivating a positive, supportive school environment. Due to how behavioral health symptoms may manifest, we believe that youth with a mental health condition may be disproportionately impacted by the provisions of HB 384.

HB 384 requires the appointment of school bullying officers, without provisions relating to the training or qualifications for such a position. NAMI NH has concerns that without requiring significant training for these individuals on how to engage with youth through a trauma-informed lens, this bill may lead to adverse interactions between youth with a mental illness and these officers that may harm their mental health and recovery.

Further, the bill requires that, upon a subsequent occurrence of bullying, the school bullying officer file a petition alleging that the youth is a child in need of services. NAMI NH is firmly opposed to

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this provision, as it will likely lead to increased court involvement for youth impacted by mental illness.

As introduced, the policies proposed in HB 384 may lead to increased court and justice system involvement for youth with mental health conditions, rather than connecting them to necessary treatments and supports within the community to successfully address the conditions and behaviors that may lead to instances of reported bullying. Should this bill go forward, NAMI NH urges the committee to amend the bill to remove the provisions relating to CHINS and, should the committee desire to maintain the provisions creating a school bullying officer, set appropriate qualifications and training requirements for the school bullying officer to ensure that their interactions with youth do not lead to adverse outcomes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Samuel C. Hawkins