



February 12, 2025

Honorable Chairman Terry Roy
House Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
Legislate Office Building Room 202-204
33 North State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for HB 597

Dear Chairman Roy 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 support of HB 597, establishing a designated behavioral health access point within the enhanced 911 system.

Having been established in July of 2022, NH's 988 crisis and suicide lifeline is still relatively new. Despite the state investing in a successful promotional campaign, there are still some individuals who have either not heard of 988, or when in crisis still call 911 because that is what they are used to. Currently, the 911 system has a protocol in place to transfer mental health crisis calls to the 988 call centers when it is appropriate to do so. This bill would not change this practice, but instead simply codify this protocol. Transferring these calls to 988 makes sense for several reasons, including freeing up 911 services for higher level physical health and public safety emergencies, and that 988 staff have specialized training to work with people in a psychiatric crisis over the phone and have a close connection with community resources.

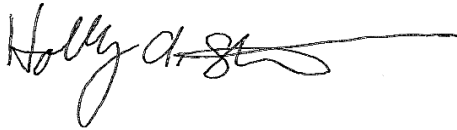
When individuals with mental illness receive the right services, at the right place, at the right time, fewer folks will end up homeless, hospitalized, and/or incarcerated, all of which cost the state far more than providing the community-based services that 988 staff can provide a referral for. A majority of calls to 988 do not necessitate a mobile dispatch for immediate assessment. Unlike 911 where emergency services are always dispatched, many calls to 988 can be resolved on the phone. Therefore, both services and money are saved when mental health crisis calls get routed to 988 rather than being responded to by 911.

Find Help, Find Hope.

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Mental health crisis needs and deserves a mental health response. This goal is supported by current practices, and should be codified into law. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote ought to pass on HB 597

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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