



February 18, 2025

Honorable Chairman Bill Gannon
Senate Judiciary Committee
State House Room 100
107 North Main Street, Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to SB 142

Dear Chairman Gannon 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 share concerns regarding SB 142, establishing the department of children's services and juvenile justice.

NAMI NH understands and acknowledges the good intent behind SB 142, having the best interest of all children in mind. However, NAMI NH is concerned that the bill may lead to unintended consequences and uses funding that could be better invested into community-based services for children and youth in such a tight budget season. Our primary concern with the bill is that it may disrupt continuity of care when young adults are transitioning from children's mental health services to adult mental health services. We know that individuals and families already struggle to maintain necessary services during this transition period, and separating current systems may lead to further fragmentation that could lead to more people falling through the cracks. Our secondary concern is that moving existing systems and establishing this new department would be very costly during a time when the Children's System of Care is not fully funded, with prioritized needs for residential treatment services identified by the Department of Health and Human Services not being funded in the agency budget, and a lack of sufficient community-based services available.

When young adults transition from the youth mental health system to the adult system there are several changes. One of these is that the family who was supporting the young adult and assisting with treatment services is no longer allowed to talk to the treatment providers without written consent of the young adult. NAMI NH has heard from several families who struggle while their loved one has difficulty navigating the transition from the youth mental health system to the adult system. The family is simply not able to provide the type of support they have in the past and the young person transitioning is on their own to navigate the system. This has proven daunting even with both the youth and adult systems currently existing under the same roof, DHHS. If youth mental health services were pulled out of DHHS and placed in their own department, this transition would be that much more difficult to navigate. It is critical to have all mental health services throughout the lifespan under one department to ease the transition.

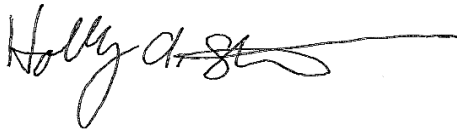
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Secondly, we have heard several times this session that significant budget cuts are necessary, including budget cuts to the Children's System of Care, all the while we are in the midst of a youth mental health crisis. One in five youth aged 6-17 experience a mental illness each year in New Hampshire, a marked recent increase from the previous statistic of one in six. Further, every day, youth are boarding in emergency departments while waiting for inpatient care. Given this mental health crisis, NAMI NH believes it would be prudent to invest more money into community-based services in the existing Children's System of Care rather than investing a significant amount of money in pulling certain departments out of DHHS and establishing a Department of Children's Services and Juvenile Justice. It is simply not the right time to expend the funds necessary to establish this new department.

Again, NAMI NH recognizes and acknowledges the intent of this bill to improve services and outcomes for children. However, due to the unintended consequences outlined above, and the cost that the state would incur for this type of change, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote inexpedient to legislate on SB 142

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.