



March 12, 2025

Honorable Chairman Wayne MacDonald
House Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 201
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH testimony on HB 636 (neutral with concerns)

Chairman MacDonald 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. While NAMI NH is not taking a position on HB 636, relative to community mental health providers, we offer the following comments and urge the committee to exercise great caution when considering this bill.

HB 636 would make two small yet significant changes to the law that governs community mental health programs. First, it would allow for-profit entities to provide community mental health services in our state without the same regulation and oversight as the ten community mental health centers, and secondly, it would allow them to do so without a psychiatrist providing treatment at the facility.

New Hampshire's ten community mental health centers are the safety net for all Granite Staters with severe mental illness and severe and persistent mental illness. The regulations that govern the community mental health centers require them to serve all individuals who qualify for their services regardless of the person's ability to pay for services. They serve many Medicaid beneficiaries who have a monthly spend down requirement before Medicaid benefits take effect. Although these individuals incur bills for these services, many are unable to pay them, and therefore, these bills become uncompensated care incurred by the community mental health centers on a monthly basis. They also serve individuals who are uninsured or under insured, which

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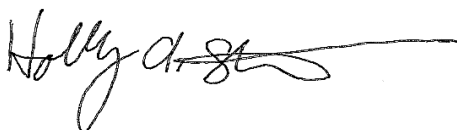
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contributes further to the uncompensated care. Again, the community mental health centers must serve all qualified individuals even if they are not getting paid for the services. Because other entities would not be governed by the same regulations as the community mental health centers, they would be able to refuse services to individuals who are not able to pay for services and may choose only to serve paying individuals. In effect, this may leave the majority of non-paying individuals to continue receiving services at the community mental health centers, while at the same time undermining the existing paying patient base, furthering the financial strain on the community mental health centers and thus jeopardizing their ability to continue providing services to the community.

Additionally, HB 636 removes the requirement that a psychiatrist provide medical oversight. This is extremely concerning for NAMI NH, especially in cases of first episode psychosis, where individuals require close medical oversight. The evidence-based treatment for first episode psychosis calls for starting individuals on low doses of medications and increasing them very slowly so as not to unnecessarily over-medicate someone with antipsychotic medication. This practice requires a psychiatrist on site to carefully make these medication changes. HB 636's removal of psychiatrist oversight for these very complex psychiatric cases may result in individuals receiving improper care.

NAMI NH urges the committee to use the utmost caution when considering the changes HB 636 makes to the laws governing community mental health providers. Although the bill seems well-meaning, given the shortage of providers in our state, it could have dire unintended consequences that instead exacerbate the mental health crisis by destabilizing our community mental health system, putting New Hampshire's entire mental health system at risk and failing to provide necessary care to the most complex psychiatric cases.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Holly A. Stevens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.