



April 1, 2025

Honorable Chair Ruth Ward
Senate Education Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 101
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to HB 10 as Amended by the House

Chair Ward and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sam Hawkins, and I represent 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 writing in opposition to HB 10 as Amended by the House, establishing the parental bill of rights.

NAMI NH recognizes the fundamental importance of the parent-child relationship in a child's development and the impact it has on their lifelong mental health and opportunities. Parents not only have the right to direct the upbringing and care of their children, but also the responsibility to do so: to provide the support and resources they need to become healthy, thriving adults. However, we do have significant concerns regarding the provisions of HB 10 as Amended by the House.

Our most significant concern is how this bill seems to conflict with current law. It is our understanding that, under current law, there are limited circumstances where a minor may receive confidential treatment, including treatment for substance use disorders, which can be crucial to encourage youth to seek help and recovery. As introduced, HB 10 maintained these protections. However, the bill as amended by the House seems to remove them, which could lead to young people not getting the help they need.

Further, the bill only allows an exception to records access when the parent is the subject of an investigation of a crime committed against the child and law enforcement agency or official specifically requests it be withheld. NAMI NH believes that there should be some mechanism for withholding records if the provider has a reasonable belief that such disclosure will result in abuse or neglect, and if there is an ongoing investigation into a report of abuse or neglect, and that this standard should align with the standards in NH's Child Protection Act in order to balance the priorities of parental rights and child safety. We also believe this kind of exception should also apply to mandatory disclosures from school personnel.

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More broadly, we have concerns regarding the mandatory disclosure policies laid out in this bill. As an organization, we agree that family relationships are the most impactful within a child's life. But it also takes a full community of support to ensure their health, wellness, safety, and opportunity. Some children will approach other community members, including educators, with their questions, concerns, or feelings before opening up to their parents. This is not because that relationship is more important than the relationship with the parent, but because it is a lower-stakes relationship and opportunity for them to explore their situation.

It is crucial that educators are open to having these crucial conversations with students when the student feels they need to happen. We have concerns that the high standards laid out in this bill, combined with the lack of an exception for suspected abuse or neglect, may result in teachers not being there for students when they need them, or students not being willing to speak to teachers. These conversations are a crucial stepping-stone to building a child's confidence so that they may go to their parents with the issue – and without them, many children may go on facing their personal challenges in silence.

With all of this in mind, NAMI NH asks, should the committee advance such a policy or similar policies, that there be nuanced consideration of the aforementioned concerns to ensure that children and families get the care they need and can have productive lifelong health and outcomes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'S'.

Samuel C. Hawkins