



April 9, 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 regarding SB 96

Chairman Cordelli and Committee Members:

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 with concerns regarding SB 96, relative to mandatory disclosure by school district employees to parents.

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. 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 trusted adults, 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 this bill may result in teachers not being there for students when they need them, or students not being willing to speak to teachers. This concern is only exacerbated by the vagueness of the "completely" standard. These conversations are a crucial stepping-stone to building a child's confidence so that they may go to their parents with the issue – without them, many children may go on facing their personal challenges in silence.

Further, while the bill does allow for information to be withheld if there is a belief that disclosure will result in abuse or neglect, it is unclear to us how the department will handle such reports of expected or imminent harm, abuse, or neglect. The bill as drafted does not lay out any process for what is to happen after a report, providing no real process for the department to ensure the future safety of the child.

Find Help, Find Hope.

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As such, NAMI NH asks that the committee carefully consider the consequences of such policies and how it may have a chilling effect on a child's mental wellness, in addition to the questions of process that the bill fails to address. Any policy that is passed must take a nuanced approach to balancing the safety and mental health of children and the wellness and freedoms of the family.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a prominent initial 'S'.

Samuel C. Hawkins