



May 6, 2025

The Honorable Chairman James Gray
Senate Finance Committee
107 N. Main Street
Concord, NH 03301

Re: NAMI New Hampshire Opposition to HB 1 & HB 2

Good afternoon, Chairman Gray and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Susan Stearns and I am the Executive Director of NAMI New Hampshire. NAMI New Hampshire is a nonprofit grassroots organization working to improve the lives of all people impacted by mental illness and suicide through support, education, and advocacy. On behalf of NAMI NH, I offer this testimony in opposition to HB 1 & HB 2.

The budget passed by the House drastically cuts critical mental health programs. If it were to be enacted, it would almost certainly result in more people in a mental health crisis waiting even longer in NH emergency departments for an inpatient psychiatric bed. And it would undo 18 months of collective work through the Mission Zero initiative that has led to real progress – significantly reduced wait times for adults and, in recent months, reaching the goal of zero adults boarding on multiple days – something we had last seen only briefly during the height of the Covid pandemic.

These cuts would impact crisis services, community-based care, and housing that allows people with mental illness to live in their communities. In addition, the Medicaid provider rate cuts would undermine the very foundation of our community mental health system – and Mission Zero.

In 2011, after years of disinvestment in NH's mental health system that led to many community-based inpatient beds closing due to insufficient funding, the NH legislature made the fateful decision to close the Anna Philbrook Center and move children requiring that level of psychiatric care to a unit at NH Hospital – the state's facility for adults. By 2012, emergency department boarding had come to NH – where it continues to this day.

NH's work to recover from these past catastrophic cuts has taken years. Mission Zero is a key part of the work to restore what was once considered one of the best mental health

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systems in the country. The current budget, as passed by the House, will set us back more than a decade, eroding critical systems of care.

Community Mental Health Programs

The budget passed by the House proposes deep cuts of \$38M over the biennium to vital community mental health services. Programs that could be impacted include NH Rapid Response Crisis Services & 988, funds to help alleviate the burden of the uncompensated care for our community mental health centers, two evidence-based practices – Assertive Community Treatment and Critical Time Intervention, mental health care for Deaf individuals, the 16 bed Cypress Center – a designated receiving facility, and numerous transitional and supported housing programs, including the Housing Bridge Subsidy Program that provides assistance for people waiting for a federal Section 8 voucher – typically a multi-year wait, and Landlord Incentives to help people ready to discharge from NH Hospital access rentals in the community. While every one of these programs is vital, the reduction of our crisis services, loss of any DRF beds, and cuts to housing programs will result in more people boarding longer in emergency departments across our state.

Medicaid

NAMI NH appreciates the stated intent of maintaining Medicaid eligibility through the introduction of premiums for some Medicaid recipients and increase in prescription copayments. However, such premiums will likely mean that both adults and children with mental health conditions will not be able to maintain Medicaid coverage which will mean that they will lose relationships with providers and struggle to reestablish care. We also know too well the limited budgets that people living with severe and persistent mental illness face where even the small increase proposed in copayments will mean some of our most vulnerable folks will fall out of treatment compliance.

Even more alarming is the proposed across-the-board 3% cut to Medicaid provider rates. There is no question that this will negatively impact our mental health system, worsening our workforce shortage, and making access to mental health care even more challenging. Medicaid is the very foundation of our mental health system, and such a cut will threaten the ability of some providers to sustain services.

Student Loan Repayment Program

HB 2 proposes to “freeze” the Student Loan Repayment Program (SLRP), a vital tool in our collective efforts to address the workforce shortage that impedes timely access to mental health care. NAMI NH is concerned that such a freeze will deter individuals from continuing their education and lead to fewer master’s level clinicians in our state, impeding access to timely care and resulting in greater utilization of hospital emergency departments.

Philbrook Sale

The Philbrook building is currently being used to provide Transitional Housing Services to 16 adults living with severe and persistent mental illness. These are individuals who do not require the clinical care of a psychiatric hospital but do need support and other services to live in the community. It is beyond ironic that it was the closure of the Anna Philbrook Center in 2011 that was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back, leading to emergency department boarding that began in 2012 and continues to this day.

Children's Services

The House budget does not fund the NH Children's Behavioral Health Resource Center, a key component of the Children's System of Care. In addition, the budget passed by the House would eliminate entirely the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA). The OCA is essential in ensuring the safety of all children in our state and has served a critical role in investigating and advocating on behalf of children with mental health conditions who are in state-funded residential care, become involved in the child protection or juvenile justice system, or who are boarding in emergency departments during a psychiatric crisis. In NAMI NH's experience, the OCA has been very responsive to parents seeking help with significant systemic challenges facing their children – and there is no other entity that fulfills this role.

Justice-Involved Individuals

Among the cuts in the House budget that will impact people with mental illness are those proposed for services and supports through the Department of Corrections, especially those for individuals with a mental health condition. With the elimination of these services, we anticipate negative impacts upon the mental health of incarcerated individuals, increased recidivism rates, and difficulty implementing the Medicaid waiver for which the state recently applied.

For all these reasons – and more, NAMI New Hampshire urges the Senate to reverse the House budget cuts and incorporate priority policies, such as funding for 988, children's emergency behavioral health services, transitional housing programs, and homelessness services. A state budget is a reflection of its priorities. We hear every day from folks that, though it may be flawed, our system has saved and changed lives for the better. We implore the Senate to build a budget that reflects this priority and supports systems that NH residents rely upon every day.

Thank you for your service to our state and your steadfast support of the 285,000 Granite State adults and children who experience a mental health condition each year.

Sincerely,



Susan L. Stearns
Executive Director