



May 6, 2025

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

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to HB 446

Chair Ward and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Sam Hawkins, and I represent NAMI NH, 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 speak in opposition to HB 446, relative to parental notice for non-academic surveys in public schools, which would require the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to be an opt-in survey.

Schools are a community within a community. It is important to acknowledge that the learning environment and the ability of schools to teach its students is greatly impacted by the social environment of the school. Youth and the school learning environment are directly impacted by many of the same troubles faced by adults and our larger communities. These include mental illness, substance misuse, bullying and violence, homelessness and housing instability, poverty, and discrimination. The school environment is informed by the lives and troubles of the youth that it serves and the wider community it exists within.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a reliable tool which has been tested and validated nationally to monitor key health and wellness factors impacting the youth within our communities. This survey provides schools, communities, and social service providers with critical data to identify changing trends and high areas of risk which are essential for targeting prevention and intervention efforts which will ultimately improve the educational outcomes and overall safety and wellbeing of all students.

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Concern is often raised that asking youth about mental health and suicidality will contribute to the very same negative mental health outcomes. We believe that such concern, and the belief that talking about mental health and suicide openly may be dangerous, is rooted in the same stigma surrounding mental health that has for so long led to people not seeking the care they need. When we openly and responsibly speak about mental health and suicide, we can eliminate that stigma and encourage all people to reach out and ask for help. In this way, the YRBS can be a valuable tool, opening up honest conversations about mental health and suicide so that youth can feel comfortable seeking support from their family.

It is important to emphasize again that the YRBS is a reliable, validated tool. It is safe and anonymous and does not encourage risky behavior or contribute to negative mental health outcomes for youth. It is also entirely optional – both students and their parents can opt-out of the survey at any time either in its entirety or question by question.

NAMI NH fully believes that parents should receive notice of non-academic surveys, have the ability to review their contents, and have the choice to opt their student out. However, we are opposed to policies that would make the survey an opt-in. Busy parents may miss the notice regarding the YRBS due to their busy lives, disallowing their child to participate even if the parent would otherwise encourage participation. The opt-in requirement will make it nearly impossible to obtain a return rate which can provide statistically valid results, leading to a lack of quality data that will hinder the prevention and intervention efforts of communities across the state. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to reject HB 446.

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