



NAMI New Hampshire

January 14, 2026

Honorable Chairman Robert Lynn
House Judiciary
One Granite Place, Room 230
Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for HB 1067

Dear Chairman Lynn 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. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am testifying today in favor of HB 1067, relative to the mental health courts.

People with mental illness and substance use disorders (SUDs) are overrepresented in our nation's jails and prisons. An estimated 44% of people in jails and 37% of people in prisons have a mental illness, and an estimated 65% of people in prisons have an underlying SUD. In the veterans' community, 55% of the nearly 50,000 veterans incarcerated in local jails report experiencing a mental illness.

Mental illness is not a crime, but untreated symptoms and limited access to care lead many to involvement with the criminal justice system. Many of these individuals are held for committing non-violent, minor offenses and misdemeanors resulting from the symptoms of untreated illness (disorderly conduct, loitering, trespassing, disturbing the peace) or for offenses like shoplifting and petty theft.

Despite having some national data, the specifics regarding the intersection of criminal justice and mental health in New Hampshire are spotty at best. However, it is estimated that 2 in 5 people who are incarcerated in our state have a mental illness (37% in state and federal prisons and 44% in local jails)¹ and 66% of women in NH's prison reported having a history of mental illness. According to a Union Leader article, "More than half of the inmates at prisons in New Hampshire have a mental health diagnosis. The number is even higher among women inmates: 67% were prescribed psychiatric medication in 2021." The article

¹ NAMI National Mental Illness and the Criminal Justice System.

Find Help, Find Hope.

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InfoLine: 800-242-6264 • Tel. 603-225-5359 • Fax 603-228-8848 • info@naminh.org / www.NAMINH.org

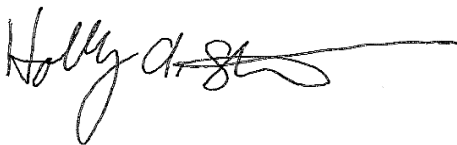
goes on to state that in Rockingham County, 51% of the 170 people residing in their jail require an active treatment plan or have a significant mental health diagnosis.²

Mental health courts present a voluntary opportunity to take a different path through the judicial process. They are a specialized docket within the criminal justice system which seeks to address the underlying mental illness that contributes to the commission of criminal offenses. They offer treatment and a road to recovery rather than a road to just confinement. Generally, our jails and prisons do not offer mental health treatment, though they house many people with mental illnesses. The use of mental health courts has shown a reduction in recidivism because the underlying mental illness is being treated.

We know that when people with a mental illness receive the correct treatment, they can go on to live very productive lives. NAMI NH has heard from individuals and family members of individuals who have had the opportunity to go through mental health court instead of the traditional justice system path. They have reported extremely positive experiences and results. In fact, one person who we outreached to inform about this hearing told us that she really wanted to come and testify about her own experience with the Hillsborough mental health court. However, due to her work schedule she could not be here. Were she here, she would tell you that her experience with mental health court saved her life. We have also heard from individuals and family members who mental health court was not an option because of where they live. They have expressed that they feel they would have been better served had mental health court been available to them.

Mental health courts can be life changing for people with mental illness or SUDs who become involved in the criminal justice system. They have been associated with reduced recidivism and incarceration and can even improve mental health outcomes. It would be beneficial to the state and granite staters with a mental illness if mental health courts were more widely available throughout the state. Therefore, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote ought to pass on HB 1067.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Holly A. Stevens', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

² Mark Hayward, New Hampshire Union Leader, NH faces overlap of crime, mental illness: Jail super days “they don’t belong in concrete” October 22, 2022

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