



NAMI New Hampshire

January 15, 2026

Honorable Chairman Kevin Avard
Senate Energy and Natural Resources
State House Room 103
107 North Main St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 450

Dear Chairman Avard 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 here today to speak in favor of SB 450, relative to a state parks pass pilot program for recovery centers and community mental health centers.

In New Hampshire, one in five adults experience a mental illness and one in six youth aged 12-17 experience a major depressive episode each year. This equates to 259,000 adults in the Granite State who are directly impacted by a mental health condition, with 66,000 adults living with a serious mental illness (SMI).¹ In 2021, nearly 40% of adults in New Hampshire reported symptoms of anxiety or depression. Of those experiencing a mental illness, 71,000 adults in New Hampshire did not receive the mental health care they needed.²

Research overwhelmingly shows that outdoor nature-based activities improve mental health outcomes across all populations, “including older adults with long-term conditions and people with common mental health problems and SMI, as well as healthy adults.”³ Studies have found that nature-based interventions, including forest therapies with an emphasis in immersion in nature, had a significant effect in the reduction of symptoms for depression and anxiety.⁴ Additionally, according to the US

¹ NAMI 2025 NH Fact Sheet

² Ibid.

³ Coventry PA, Brown JE, Pervin J, Brabyn S, Pateman R, Breedvelt J, Gilbody S, Stancliffe R, McEachan R, White PL. Nature-based outdoor activities for mental and physical health: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *SSM Popul Health.* 2021 Oct 1;16:100934. doi: 10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100934. PMID: 34646931; PMCID: PMC8498096.

⁴ Ibid.

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, connection and engagement with community, including parks and recreation centers, has positive health benefits. These benefits include improving people's ability to manage stress, anxiety and depression. Connection and engagement with community also reduce the risk of serious illness, including anxiety and depression.⁵

There are 10 Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in New Hampshire. In 2024, the CMHCs served almost 54,000 unique individuals in our state. The CMHCs primarily serve as the safety net in their communities for those children and adults being treated for mental illness or emotional disorders. In FY 2024, 74% of the CMHCs' revenues were for Medicaid enrollees, many of which have severe and persistent mental illness.⁶ Many of the individuals being served by the CMHCs have social security disability income (SSDI) or supplemental security income (SSI) as their only source of income. As a result, they have very little money left over every month for items such as entertainment.

Knowing that many of the people receiving services at the CMHCs would be unable to afford the admission fees to our wonderful state parks and knowing that the research shows a strong correlation between nature and the reduction of mental health symptoms, SB 450 would have a positive impact for those receiving services at the CMHCs. Therefore, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote ought to pass on SB 450.

Sincerely,



Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/social-connectedness/about/index.html>, May 15 2024

⁶ 2024 Community Behavioral Health Association Annual report

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