

February 9, 2025

Honorable Chair Kristin Noble
House Education Policy and Administration Committee
Granite Place Room 232
1 Granite Pl, Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Opposition to HB 1191

Chair Noble and Committee Members:

On behalf of NAMI NH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, I write in opposition to HB 1191, relative to parental notice for non-academic surveys in public schools.

For several years now, policymakers, advocates, and communities in New Hampshire have worked diligently to support youth mental health, connect young people to the care they need, and prevent suicide deaths. This effort is critical not only within our communities, but within schools. Youth and the school learning environment are directly impacted by many of the challenges present in our larger communities. These include mental illness, substance misuse, bullying and violence, homelessness and housing instability, poverty, and discrimination.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is an essential tool for our state to understand the ongoing and emerging challenges that young Granite Staters are facing, allowing communities to identify changing trends and high areas of risk. According to the 2023 NH YRBS, approximately 40% of students felt sad or hopeless almost every day, and 21% of students seriously considered attempting suicide. These are startling numbers – however, thanks to the YRBS, we also can see that these numbers represent roughly a 4% decrease for both statistics when compared to 2021 results. This demonstrates the value of the YRBS as a consistent, centralized data source so that we can meaningfully understand the progression of youth mental health over time.

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. 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.

Per testimony provided by state agency staff last legislative session, the state needs roughly a 60% participation rate to ensure representative results. However, in 2021 and 2023, the state achieved

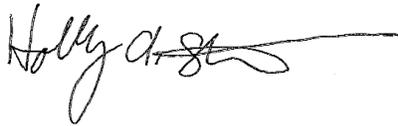
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approximately 65% participation, only 5% above the criteria. That requiring an opt-in would create unusable data is not simply a concern – it is a reality. Should a parent wish to opt their child out, they should be able to. However, among the myriad of permission slips and documents that go home with students, that 5% of consent forms would fail to return is not hard to imagine. Among those youth who would no longer be able to contribute to the survey, we firmly believe that the vast majority of parents would support their child’s participation, but may simply miss the opt-in before it’s too late. For these families, they would then be losing a tool that is so essential to protecting the mental health of their child.

When we openly and responsibly speak about mental health and suicide, we can eliminate 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. Simply put, the YRBS is a safe, reliable, and essential tool which has been tested and validated nationally to monitor key health and wellness factors impacting the youth within our communities, and one that must be maintained in New Hampshire. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to recommend ITL for HB 1191.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Holly A. Stevens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

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