

April 1, 2026

Honorable Chairman John Hunt
House Commerce and Consumer Affairs
Room 229
1 Granite Place, Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 573

Dear Chairman Hunt 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 SB 573, establishing certification standards for facility comfort dogs.

As way of background, NAMI NH has a seat on the Commission to Study the Incidence of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in First Responders. This commission has been very productive and recommended important and necessary policy changes during its existence. SB 573 regarding comfort dog certification standards is another such policy arising from the great work of the commission.

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. In addition to this base line of incidence of mental illness, there are those who experience traumatic experiences on a daily basis.

Compared to the general population, first responders experience higher rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. In fact, data from the US Department of Health and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration showed that 30% of first responders have a mental health condition, which equates to nearly one in three.

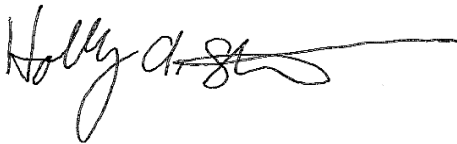
Unlike typical police dogs, comfort dogs work to ease the trauma for individuals impacted by violence, tragedy, or traumatic events. They can be used in the community or within the organization to alleviate symptoms of mental illness. Comfort dogs provide emotional

¹ NAMI 2025 NH Fact Sheet

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support to first responders and the community. They help with trauma, assist in building trust, and help reduce stress at crisis scenes, natural disaster sites, schools, hospitals, and community events to assist crime victims and first responders dealing with high-pressure situations. These specially trained dogs offer a calming presence, ease interactions and improve mental well-being for both first responders and the people they serve. They also bridge gaps in community relations. Given the connection between comfort dogs and improved mental health, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote ought to pass on SB 573 regarding the certification of this important resource.

Sincerely,

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

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.

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