



May 1, 2024

Honorable Chairman Wayne MacDonald  
House Health, Human Services, and Elderly Affairs Committee  
Legislative Office Building Rooms 205-207  
33 N State St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support for SB 411

Dear Chairman MacDonald and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sam Hawkins, and I am the Public Policy Assistant at 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 support of SB 411, establishing a committee to study emergency mental health services for persons 21 years of age and younger in New Hampshire.

Both locally and nationally, our communities continue to experience a mental health crisis, with high rates of stress, anxiety, and depression across all ages, though particularly impacting one of our most vulnerable populations: children and youth.

SB 411, as introduced, sought to address gaps in insurance coverage for certain mental health services for youth. While SB 411 was going through the legislative process, the New Hampshire Insurance Department convened a working group seeking to address the issues identified in SB 411. The working group was able to resolve some, but not all, aspects of the issue. As such, SB 411 was turned into a study committee so that the legislature could further study the issue and determine the best way for services to be covered by insurance.

Specifically, this legislation would look at coverage for high-fidelity wraparound services, known as FAST (Families and Systems Together) Forward, which are intensive family-focused services that can prevent the necessity for hospitalization when children or youth are experiencing serious emotional and behavioral concerns. FAST Forward provides youth and family-driven wraparound services focused on helping youth and families

*Find Help, Find Hope.*

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identify their strengths and their needs, develop a plan, and connect to services in their communities. As a provider of family peer support services through this program, NAMI NH can attest first-hand to its positive impact.

Currently, private insurance carriers do not cover Fast Forward wraparound services in New Hampshire. Despite not having coverage through their private carriers, families can still access FAST Forward at the expense of NH taxpayers with funding through the NH's Bureau of Children's Behavioral Health and through Medicaid. Through the study that SB 411 would enable, New Hampshire can look at the best way to pay for these services. By expanding coverage and providing additional avenues for access to care, services could be started earlier on, potentially alleviating the need for hospitalization later and reducing the burden on our state's mental health system.

SB 411 offers a crucial opportunity to look at the systems and services available to support our most vulnerable youth and address any gaps that may exist so that youth can get access to the services they need, when and where they need them. For these reasons, NAMI NH urges the committee to vote OTP for SB 411.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samuel C. Hawkins". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Samuel C. Hawkins