

Laurie Emerson, Executive Director  
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont  
January 20, 2023

Madam Chair Houghton, Vice Chair McFaun, and House Health Care Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing NAMI Vermont to provide comment on the Governor's Proposed FY2023 Budget Adjustment to expedite the funding for a Youth In-Patient Facility.

NAMI Vermont supports the investment from the State of Vermont to establish a youth in-patient facility. We applaud the efforts of the state to integrate mental health with physical health to co-locate a youth psychiatric facility at a medical hospital to support children with complex co-occurring needs. We appreciate the Southwestern Vermont Medical Center's proposal to establish a youth in-patient facility and stepping up as the sole bidder.

There are several factors that we want the legislature and the state to consider when finalizing an offer.

We ask that you include family-based organizations and other family members who have first person experience with the system of care in the feasibility study to learn from them about their needs, requirements, experiences, and challenges. There are three non-profit family-based organizations that serve the state: NAMI Vermont, Vermont Family Network and the Vermont Federation of Families. We ask that you listen to the voices of first-person experience through our network of families. Include families as you make critical decisions to invest funding to support children, youth, and families.

When tropical storm Irene swept away the Vermont State Psychiatric Hospital, the state rallied to find a solution to place patients in their own community hospital where psychiatric units were established. Our children and youth deserve the same respect and consideration – to be close to home, near mom, dad, their siblings, and other support systems. Establishing a second in-patient facility in the southern part of the state does not consider family needs in the northern and central part of the state. Will transportation and lodging be provided to these families? Although there is a facility for children at CVPH, we have heard from families that it is not accessible and meeting the needs of Vermont families who need care. There have been several suicides by youth in the Northeast Kingdom. We need facilities in hospitals throughout the state.

We need other hospitals sending in a proposal to support their community. Establishing collaborative partnerships with the hospitals and state would be a more proactive approach. We understand there are capacity and staffing issues – and there are many complexities to work out.

We strongly recommend that there be a facility for children of all ages up to age 18 with complex needs. The SVMC proposal noted serving youth 12-17 years old. We hear from so many families who have a very young child who is symptomatic due to trauma or had complications in utero or shortly after birth – all ages struggle with complex needs.

How will the new youth in-patient facility serve out of state patients since there is a great need? Could there be additional funding coming from out-of-state that could help Vermont to establish more than one facility in a different region of the state?

As you collect data from DCF about youth waiting to be placed, please consider that there are families struggling at home who are not involved with DCF who have lost hope or faith in our system of care because they are repeatedly

sent home with no facilities or care available. The need could be much higher than the data that DCF shares. It is so traumatizing for a young child to be stuck in the emergency room or in a facility far away from home. They need their family's support, and we need facilities and care in all areas of the state. Let's care for and treat our youth now so that they experience recovery and resiliency and don't grow up to require the adult mental health system of care.

Thank you for listening to our comments and the committee's commitment to support youth mental health.

Respectfully Submitted,



Laurie Emerson, Executive Director  
NAMI Vermont

*NAMI Vermont is the independent Vermont chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. We are a statewide, non-profit, 501c3, grassroots, volunteer organization comprised of people who live with a mental health condition, family members, and advocates. As our mission, NAMI Vermont supports, educates and advocates so that all communities, families, and individuals affected by mental illness or mental health challenges can build better lives.*