

Laurie Emerson, Executive Director

NAMI Vermont

February 21, 2018

Re: H.874 - inmate access to prescription drugs prescribed prior to incarceration

- **Who I Am:** My name is Laurie Emerson. I am the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont (NAMI Vermont).
- **Who We Are:** NAMI Vermont is the independent Vermont chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a statewide non-profit, grassroots, volunteer organization
- **Who We Serve:** Family members, peers/individuals affected by a mental health condition, and professionals who work with them.
- **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.
- **Core Competency:** Lived experience as family members (caregivers and peers/individuals with a mental health condition)
- **Statistics:**
  - 1 in 5 (20%) people experience a mental illness<sup>1</sup>.
  - 1 in 25 (4%) adults lives with serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, major depression or bipolar disorder<sup>1</sup>.
  - In July 2016, the average daily in-state population was 1,531. There were 81 unique patients designated as Seriously Functionally Impaired (SFI). This represents 5% of the total in-state population during that month. The SFI designation does not capture the entire population who have mental health needs. Also in July, 587 (38%) of the incarcerated population received mental health services.<sup>2</sup>

## **NAMI Vermont supports bill H.874 that allows inmates access to prescription drugs prescribed prior to incarceration.**

### Importance to continue prescribed medication:

- Medication to treat a mental health condition can take 3 or more weeks to be at a therapeutic level
- Takes years to find the “right” medicine - not a one-size fits all approach
- Changing medication or formularies can have adverse effects
  - withdrawals within 4 days, psychosis, suicide ideation, suicide attempt
- Examples:
  - Families have called NAMI Vermont’s 800 line to discuss their concerns with their family member who has been incarcerated and demonstrating symptoms with their mental illness. While having a phone conversation with them, they were concerned that they were either not receiving any medication that was previously prescribed or that the medication may have been changed.
  - Individual has reported that he abruptly quit his anti-psychotic medicine and within 3 weeks attempted a lethal suicide attempt and survived.

### Concern with language in bill:

- Page 2, line 4: It is important that an evaluation is timely to avert withdrawals.
- Page 2, beginning on line 10: Abruptly discontinuing medication and not tapering medication can have adverse effects as mentioned above.
  - Under no circumstance should a medicine be discontinued abruptly. Medicine should be tapered under the supervision of a licensed physician.

### References

1. Mental Health Facts in America; NAMI Fact Sheet; Statistics cited by National Institute of Mental Health [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov). 2018.
2. Facility Study Report submitted to House Corrections; In Accordance with Act 160 Sec. 30. Vermont State Correctional Facilities. Page 10 - Mental Health. Report Date: January 19, 2017.