

Laurie Emerson, Executive Director
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont
March 27, 2020

Dear Madam Chair Kitchel and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for allowing NAMI Vermont to respond to the Governor's FY2021 Budget. Our organization would like to request an increase of \$25,000 to supplement our annual grant through the Department of Mental Health that is \$230,810. By the end of this fiscal year, we will have exhausted two funding sources that allowed us to maintain our programs and services.

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. We are the only organization in the state that offers evidence-based, NAMI signature programs and support groups for families impacted by mental illness.

NAMI Vermont is extremely grateful for the support we have received in the form of an annual grant from the Department of Mental Health which covers approximately two-thirds of our operating costs. This grant is critical to our mission, but it has been level-funded for the past six years and has not kept pace with inflationary increases. We have four full-time employees and an average of 75 volunteers who are trained to deliver our FREE classes, workshops, and 17 support groups to Vermonters.

We are a very lean, cost-effective organization that receives a limited number of grants, donations, and sponsorships to supplement our budget. Staff and volunteers go the extra mile to stay within our bare-bones budget by securing free facilities for our education programs and support groups, locating supplies that are free or low-cost, and increasing efforts to secure additional community-based grants. Despite inflation and an increase in requests for our services, we have managed to maintain our programs at the current funding level, but we have not been able to expand to meet the growing need – especially now with the COVID-19 Pandemic. During social distancing and "Stay at Home" orders, we see an increase in anxiety, feelings of isolation, and depression. We are implementing new online strategies and innovations to be able to address mental health education, training, and coping skills for the community during this uncertain time.

An increase in our annual grant from the state of Vermont would allow us to continue to provide the same number of educational programs, support groups, and presentations throughout Vermont and respond to the increasingly pressing need to expand online services to the community, especially for adolescents and young adults. We are part of the foundation of the state's efforts to provide preventive, community-based mental health services and would like to continue to meet the needs of our fellow citizens. Please support an increase of \$25,000 to our annual grant through the Department of Mental Health. Thank you for considering our request.

Respectfully,



Laurie Emerson, Executive Director
NAMI Vermont