



February 21, 2022

State of Vermont, House of Representatives
House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Re: [H.96](#), *an act relating to creating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Development Task Force*

Dear House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs:

I write on behalf of MadFreedom, a civil and human rights advocacy organization whose mission is to end the oppression and discrimination of people based on their perceived mental states. MadFreedom envisions a world where every person regardless of race, gender, sexuality, ableness, class and mental state has the freedom to live their life on their own terms without coercion and with equality under the law.

While we appreciate the intent of [H.96](#), and the changes represented in the most recent draft, H.96 is still inadequate regarding representation of individuals oppressed and discriminated against based on their perceived mental states.

[H.96, Draft No. 2.2](#) – H.96) 2/17/2022 – DJL – 11.41 AM, calls for the membership on the selection panel of just one “individual with a psychiatric disability, appointed by the Vermont Psychiatric Survivors.” By contrast, other historically marginalized groups have multiple representatives.

In addition, not everyone with a mental health condition or a psychiatric diagnosis regards themselves as disabled. For example, I have been diagnosed with a “severe psychiatric disability,” however, I do not consider myself disabled. Nevertheless, I, and people like me, are regarded by our society as disabled and have been and are discriminated against and oppressed on that basis.

For example, in the last legislative session, MadFreedom successfully advocated for this legislature to remove language from the [sexual consent law](#) that suggested that people with psychiatric disabilities or mental conditions were unable, by law, to consent to sex, which is a form of eugenics.

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In the current legislative session, MadFreedom has advocated for removal of language from the [marriage laws](#) that prohibit people with “severe psychiatric disabilities” from marrying (another form of eugenics).

These provisions demonstrate that State-sanctioned eugenics policies and practices have not disappeared. They live on in our laws and in our policies and practices. In fact, the underrepresentation of people with psychiatric labels or histories on the proposed selection committee is yet another example of institutional, structural, and systemic discrimination.

One in five U.S. adults experience mental illness each year and 104,000 Vermonters have a mental health condition.¹ Our representation on the proposed selection board should be commensurate with our presence in the population.

I urge the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs to increase the representation of individuals with psychiatric labels on the selection committee by inviting other organizations to nominate such individuals to the selection committee. The following organizations should be invited: MadFreedom, Inc; Pathways Vermont; Another Way Community Center; and Alyssum Peer Respite.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,



Wilda L. White
Founder

¹ [Mental Health in Vermont](#) (National Alliance on Mental Illness), last accessed on February 21, 2022.