

Laurie Emerson, Executive Director  
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont  
February 10, 2023

Madam Chair Wood, Vice Chair Brumsted, Ranking Member Donahue, and House Human Services Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont (NAMI Vermont) to provide comment on H.171, "An act relating to adult protective services". NAMI Vermont supports the intention of this bill, however we would like to comment on how the expansion of the bill could negatively impact peer-based organizations and the programs we provide.

History: 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. Our core competency is our first-person experience with mental illness. We provide peer support for both family members and individuals with a mental health condition. The peer support includes NAMI Signature programs such as Family Support Groups and Connection Recovery Support Groups. We train volunteers to implement these programs. The peer-to-peer approach is based on mutuality, trust, and building connection.

The new language being incorporated into the bill (page 8 G) expands who mandatory reporters will be.

[\(18\) "Mandatory reporter" means all employees, contractors, grantees, or volunteers who directly provide health care, law enforcement, caregiving, counseling, education, banking, or social services to vulnerable adults.](#)

NAMI Vermont is considered a social service organization and we are a grantee with volunteers who administer our programs. The implications of this bill on the peer organizations could create a barrier to having people attend support groups or wanting to share openly - and undermine the concepts of peer support. Announcing that you are a "mandatory reporter by law" would leave people in fear of what this might mean for them. If someone discloses abuse, our volunteers use their own moral compass to support the person disclosing abuse to have them follow through on their own to report abuse to the proper authorities. We seek to empower individuals to advocate for themselves and we provide the appropriate resources based on their situation.

Our programs do not require people to provide their name, address, or any other identifiable information. If our volunteers become "Mandatory Reporters", they do not have the information to file a report on names, addresses, age, etc... that is required by the investigative authority. This bill creates a situation where our volunteers can be held liable and fined when they are not in a position to provide the basic information required to submit a report.

We ask that the legislature create an exception for peer-based organizations to not be included as a mandatory reporter.

Thank you for listening to our comments and the committee's commitment to protect vulnerable adults.

Respectfully Submitted,



Laurie Emerson, Executive Director  
NAMI Vermont

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