

Laurie Emerson, Executive Director
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont
May 11, 2026
Committee: House Health Care

Madam Chair Black and House Health Care Committee Members,

NAMI Vermont supports the amended Bill S.193 – An act relating to establishing a forensic facility for certain criminal justice-involved persons.

We are pleased to see a new direction for Bill S.193. NAMI Vermont supports the forensic treatment facility to be under the Department of Mental Health authority as a secure therapeutic, clinical treatment setting. We strongly opposed the original intent to locate a forensic facility under the Department of Corrections. Correctional facilities have become the de facto system of care for those with mental illness, and establishing a forensic facility there reinforces the misguided belief that incarceration is an appropriate response to mental health needs.

Placement in a forensic facility is for competency restoration, evaluation, stabilization, and treatment – NOT PUNISHMENT. Following clinical best practices with forensic psychiatrists, nurses, other mental health professionals, and peer providers with trauma-informed training is necessary to ensure people get the right care at the right time and the right place.

- **Who We Are:** NAMI Vermont is the independent state chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a statewide non-profit, grassroots, volunteer organization. NAMI Vermont operates as a peer-to-peer mental health organization - established in 1984.
- **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.
- **Who We Serve:** Everyone is on the mental health continuum.
- **Statistics:**
 - More than 1 in 5 Vermonters experience mental illness each year
 - More than 1 in 20 Vermonters experience serious mental illness each year

Respectfully,

Laurie Emerson, Executive Director
NAMI Vermont