



Re: H.B. No. 6666 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH STATUTES.

Testimony of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Connecticut
By Thomas Burr
Public Health Committee
March 29, 2021

Senator Daugherty Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and members of Public Health Committee, as the Community and Affiliates Relations Manager of the Connecticut State office of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Connecticut), I am writing today regarding H.B. 6666 - An Act Concerning the Department of Public Health's Recommendations Regarding Various Revisions to the Public Health Statutes.

NAMI is the nation's largest mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all people affected by mental health conditions. NAMI Connecticut and its nine local affiliates provide support groups and educational programs for people with mental health conditions and their loved ones and advocates for policies to improve the lives of people affected by mental health conditions.

I am a member of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut and have testified many times over the past 15 years regarding the importance of investing in solutions to end homelessness. We, alongside many other partners in the state, know that safe, stable housing and access to enriched services and programs helps to prevent and end youth homelessness. When our state's young residents at risk of/ or experiencing homelessness have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. During COVID-19, the need for housing and supportive services for all of Connecticut's youth and young adults has become even more important.

The revisions in Sec. 70-72 will allow youth aged 15-24 experiencing homelessness, as verified by their school or a provider, to obtain a copy of their birth certificate and a state ID for free. The revision also specifies a definition of homelessness consistent with the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Currently, state law allows a fee waiver for individuals who are residents of a homeless shelter or other facility for homeless persons (CGS sec. 1-1h). However, many youth experiencing homelessness do not stay in a shelter. In my own experience with my son, when he was dealing with a mental health condition and was homeless, he never spent *any* time in a homeless shelter. Instead, he lived out of his car, camped out in the woods, or couch-surfed with friends and family.

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Accessing a State ID Card is critical for youth experiencing homelessness. Without an ID, youth have difficulty accessing services such as employment, housing, and benefits. In my son's case and with his mental health challenges, it simply was impossible, and added significantly to the length of time he spent in a very precarious state.

In summary, NAMI Connecticut and our members are fully supportive of the Sec. 70-72 revisions as we have outlined above, in H.B. 6666.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully

Thomas Burr
Community and Affiliates Relations Manager
NAMI Connecticut