



Re: S.B. 1085, AN ACT CONCERNING SUICIDE PREVENTION

Testimony of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Connecticut
By Lisa B. Winjum, JD, Executive Director

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Senator Daugherty Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and members of the Public Health Committee, as the Executive Director of the Connecticut State office of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Connecticut), I am writing today in strong opposition to S.B. 1085, An Act Concerning Suicide Prevention.

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 affiliates provide support groups and education programs and advocate for public policies to improve the lives of people affected by mental health conditions.

NAMI Connecticut is a member of the existing Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board (CT SAB) and our Manager of Peer Initiatives, Education, and Training, is the co-chair of the Attempt Survivor subcommittee for the CT SAB. The subcommittees' role is to elevate the voices of people with lived experience by helping with the development and implementation of the Connecticut suicide prevention plan, while also informing the board of best practices for programs, trainings, and supports for people with living with suicidal thoughts or who have attempted suicide.

Thought the spirit of this bill is to support a state suicide advisory board, it is not the "CT Suicide Advisory Board." Additionally, suicide prevention education and training are a serious matter that requires consideration to the needs of each unique profession, accountability, monitoring, and enforcement, which this bill does not address.

This bill:

- Does not align with the mission or vision of the CTSAB or the CT Suicide Prevention Plan 2025.
- Does not recognize our existing statewide CTSAB.
- Does not recognize the CTSAB suicide prevention infrastructure and development of the Regional Suicide Advisory Boards.
- Does not recognize the CTSAB as the federally mandated Advisory Board for existing suicide prevention initiatives.

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- Does not support a necessary joint state agency leadership approach, which is essential to address and impact suicide in various settings and for diverse populations.
- Does not take advantage of the opportunity to draft revised legislative language to enter the CTSAB in statute that both the Departments of Children and Families and Mental Health & Addiction Services endorse as co-chairs of the CTSAB.
- Does not provide much-needed funding to advance the infrastructure and strategic prevention, intervention, and postvention response CT needs.
- Does not use evidence-based guidance that drives suicide prevention training and education, taking into consideration the needs among various practitioners; and does not include an infrastructure to monitor and enforce for accountability among practitioners or suggest funding to ensure this process.
- Does not recognize the unique needs of children and youth and removes all reference to youth.

Should this bill pass, it would be tremendously disruptive to the statewide suicide prevention infrastructure the CTSAB has spent more than ten years developing, using on national evidence-based guidance with national technical assistance and training, and support from federal grants.

The CT SAB is nationally recognized for its work, despite the lack of dedicated funding from the state. As our overburdened, underfunded mental health system works to meet the rising demand for services in the COVID-19 environment and beyond—now is the time to reinforce and expand the existing infrastructure, not break it down or reinvent it.

We urge the Committee to vote no on S.B. 1085.