

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Connecticut
Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee**

March 25, 2013

In Support of Section 1 of

**Raised HB 6670 AN ACT CONCERNING SUPERVISED ABSENTEE VOTING, APPLICATIONS FOR
ABSENTEE BALLOTS AND DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES ASSIGNED TO MODERATORS**

Good afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Jutila and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director for Adults, State and National matters with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental illness. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for improved services, more humane treatment and an end to stigma and economic and social discrimination. We represent individuals who actually live with mental illness and parents and family members of individuals living with mental illness. I am testifying on behalf of NAMI Connecticut in support of section 1 of Raised HB 6670 An Act Concerning Supervised Absentee Voting, Applications for Absentee Ballots and Duties and Responsibilities to Moderators.

Section 1 of this bill resolves an inequity in the current absentee voting laws by providing that the voting rights for individuals receiving care in a state-operated mental health facility be equal to the voting rights already granted to individuals receiving care in a general hospital's mental health unit.

Under current law, DMHAS-operated hospitals are considered "institutions" and people residing in state institutions can only vote by absentee ballot while being supervised by a local registrar of voters.

However, individuals who are inpatients in psychiatric units of general hospitals do not have the same restrictions and can vote by absentee ballot without such supervision. In this situation, voting rights are being restricted based on whether or not the state is operating the institution. However, individuals may be in state-operated hospitals for a variety of reasons, e.g., they may need state assistance due to low income, they may require a longer stay in the hospital or they may be awaiting transition to an appropriate community-based program and services.

People in state-operated facilities receive the same inpatient services as people who happen to be receiving services in a general hospital's mental health unit. Thus, they should be treated the same way regarding their civil right to vote and having their voices heard without undue restrictions.

Thank you for your time. Daniela Giordano