

**Testimony of
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Connecticut
Before the Children Committee**

March 5, 2013

Regarding:

S.B. No. 972 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH.

In Support of:

H.R. No. 11 (COMM) RESOLUTION MEMORIALIZING THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS TO RATIFY THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD.

H.B. No. 6499 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS.

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and distinguished members of the Children Committee, my name is Sara Frankel and I am the Public Policy Director for Children, Youth and Young Adults 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 here today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to offer the following recommendations:

Proposed Senate Bill 972, *An Act Concerning Children and Behavioral Health* seeks to conduct a study to evaluate the current behavioral health support system available to children in Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut supports such a study, as we are well aware that the current system is in need of improvement. Ideally, we would like to see the children's behavioral health system in Connecticut accomplish the following goals:

- I. **Ensure access to quality community mental health services for all of Connecticut's children.** Every child in every neighborhood deserves access to mental health services irrespective of insurance status, setting, or system involvement (child welfare, juvenile justice, behavioral health, school).
- II. **Promote early identification and intervention of mental health problems in young children.** Every child in every neighborhood should have access to an early childhood

specialist and to a pediatric healthcare clinician trained to identify and triage mental health problems in infants and toddlers.

- III. **Expand and improve access to school-based and school-linked mental health services.** Every child in every neighborhood should attend a school staffed by a full-time school social worker and school psychologist, each of whom has a manageable caseload.
- IV. **Ensure that quality mental health services are adequately reimbursed and funded.** All health plans are held accountable for any and all violations of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008.

Attached to my testimony please find a document entitled *Joint Recommendations by Stakeholders for Strengthening the Mental Health Systems of Care for Children and Adolescents in Connecticut*. This document explains in further detail the goals outlined in I-IV above.

NAMI Connecticut supports raised House Resolution No. 11, Resolution Memorializing the United States Congress to Ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as proposed House Bill No. 6499, An Act Concerning the Results-Based Accountability Assessment Program and Children's Rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) appropriately recognizes that a child with mental disabilities “should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community”¹ and promotes equally the physical and mental health of the child.² In order to protect children generally, and those with mental health concerns specifically, Connecticut must urge the United States Congress to ratify the UNCRC.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23 (1)

² *Id.* at Article 17