



**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Connecticut
Before the Children's Committee
February 26, 2013**

**In Support of
SB 654 AN ACT CREATING A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID PROGRAM FOR
PARENTS**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and distinguished members of the Children 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 here today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to support SB 654 a proposal that would provide the Department of Children and Families with the authority and funding to administer grants for programs to provide community-based programs for parents to recognize signs and symptoms of mental illness in children, learn de-escalation methods in crisis situations and learn about mental health resources and how to access such resources.

Early identification of children who may be experiencing social, emotional, behavioral and mental health related issues is crucial to the well-being of children and allows for earliest possible interventions. Early interventions increase the likelihood of effective treatment including preventing emotional and behavioral problems from disrupting a child's and family's life and allowing the child and youth to live a successful life.

NAMI Connecticut stands ready to help the state identify and replicate programs that have already been successful in several Connecticut communities and nationwide and that can fulfill the intentions of this bill. For example,

NAMI's *Parents and Teachers as Allies* is a program that unites school personnel and family members by sharing resources and partnering to address challenging behaviors of children in their care that may be linked to mental illness. The program offers mainstream educators, school administrators an in-service training covering the neurobiological basis of mental illness,



the signs and symptoms associated with early onset of serious mental illness in children as well as local and state resources to share with parents. The program is delivered by a trained panel consisting of a family member, consumer and educator.¹

NAMI Basics is a community education course targeted to parents and caregivers of children and adolescents with mental illness that have diverse and complex needs and is taught by trained teachers who are the parent or other caregivers of individuals who developed the symptoms of mental illness prior to the age of 13 years.²

NAMI's Family-to-Family is a nationally recognized program that provides education on the neurobiological basis of serious mental illnesses, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major clinical depression and anxiety disorder. It provides information, resources and support for family members of individuals with serious mental illness based on the lived experiences of other family members. The program is delivered by trained volunteer family facilitators.³

We appreciate this opportunity to engage in this important discussion and offer the expertise and experience of our members to fulfill on the goal of supporting parents in raising awareness and understanding of mental illness, mental health, learning skills to support their children and decreasing stigma.

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

¹ The *Parents and Teachers as Allies* program has produced positive outcomes for school professionals in diverse schools across the country. (Results by Deborah Medoff, Ph.D., Lisa Dixon, M.D., M.P.H. University of Maryland School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry.) Additionally, in 2005, Minnesota passed a state law that requires all teachers, as part of their recertification process, to receive training on mental health related issues. The training that is currently used to fulfill this requirement is based on NAMI's *Parents and Teachers as Allies*.

² For additional information about NAMI Basics, see http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=nami_basics1.

³ NAMI's *Family-to-Family* program demonstrates the value of free, community-based self-help programs as a "complement" to professional mental health services. <http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=Family-to-Family&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=126774>