



February 27, 2019

Dear Committee Members:

Violence. It's a word that conjures up many feelings including fear, compassion for victims, passion for change and against change. For NAMI Minnesota it conjures up worry that mental illnesses and violence will be linked. It doesn't matter how many studies are presented that people with serious mental illnesses are more likely to be the victim than the perpetrators, that the factors associated with mass shooters are more numerous than just mental illnesses, that this connection leads to negative attitudes towards people with mental illnesses and prevents people from seeking treatment. The narrative, despite research saying otherwise, remains the same. When violence occurs, fingers wrongly point to mental illnesses.

We have spent time studying and discussing HF 9. What we have been told is that in the end, the bill is about preventing suicide. The number of deaths by suicide using guns is high and these attempts are almost always lethal. There aren't a lot of homicides in Minnesota. In 2017 there were 122 homicides, 78 by firearms – versus 780 deaths by suicide – 364 by guns. We know that in some other states that passed similar laws, the suicide rate dropped a few percentage points. We know from calls into our office and a survey of police departments several years ago that families faced hurdles removing firearms from a loved one's home whom they believed were suicidal. Some departments would hold the guns for a period of time, while others would not. We believe these challenges to keeping people safe should be addressed.

However, if the focus of the bill is to be on suicide prevention, then NAMI Minnesota respectfully requests that the narrative surrounding the bill and the language in the bill reflect this. This means not using the word "violence" to include suicide. An alternative phrase would be "harm or death" instead of "violence." We urge you to separate out the two situations in which you would like to be able to remove firearms and not lump them together. Treating suicide as a public health issue also means not having the record of the firearm being removed public. This serves no purpose. People who are suicidal are not endangering others and having that record be public will serve to discourage people from using this avenue and create shame and negative consequences for someone who felt such despair and lack of hope that they were contemplating taking their own life.

We realize that there are strong feelings about bills on this topic. We ask, however, that you not further spread misinformation about people with mental illnesses being violent and that you not lump together violence and suicide. They are very different and should be addressed differently. Thank you for taking the time to learn of our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Abderholden".

Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director



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