

April 5, 2021

Members of the House Judiciary and Civil Law Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, we are writing in support of several sections in the delete-all amendment for the judiciary omnibus bill before you. Article 5, Section 9 is an important provision to ensure the mental health care data of people being helped by law enforcement are protected. As we continue to build our mental health system, we've been happy to see more and more law enforcement agencies provide specific responses to people in a crisis. We know from partnering with providers and law enforcement that many communities have "familiar faces" who can have dozens of interactions with first responders every year. Mental health units and co-responder teams around the state are working every day to connect people to resources and offer preventative solutions to avoid criminalizing mental illnesses and basic needs. It's important for both the officers responding and the people who are being served to feel confident that sensitive medical data will be protected and kept private.

We're also supportive of the provisions to maintain the privacy of people making complaints to the ombuds for corrections in Article 5, Section 12. NAMI advocated to reopen the office of the Ombuds for Corrections in 2019 because our members, people with mental illnesses and their families, are disproportionately represented in the prison system. The work of the Ombuds for Corrections makes the prison system better and safer for everyone, incarcerated people and corrections officers, but it is important to acknowledge the vulnerable position of incarcerated people who need to raise issues, a vulnerability that can be exacerbated by a mental illness. Maintaining the privacy of a complainant until the case is resolved helps to build trust and maintain the legitimacy of the Office of Ombuds for Corrections.

Finally, we support the provisions in Article 3 to consider financial hardship when applying fines and fees. We believe we promote better public safety and a more holistic vision of justice when we consider needs of both victims and perpetrators. People with mental illnesses are also disproportionately affected by homelessness and poverty, and overburdensome fines and fees can serve as barriers to recovery. By reducing that barrier for the people who need it most we can ultimately reduce recidivism and promote wellness in all our communities especially in a post-pandemic world. We hope you will pass these important measures and continue working to improve the lives of people with mental illnesses. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director

Elliot Butay  
Criminal Justice Coordinator