



June 21, 2021

The Honorable Representative Adrian C. Madaro, Chair
Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery
State House Room 33
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Senator Julian Cyr, Chair
Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery
State House Room 312-E
Boston, MA 02133

Re:

In Support of S.1257/H.2090 An Act establishing a special commission to study and report on the history of state institutions for people with developmental and mental health disabilities in the Commonwealth

Dear Representative Madaro, Senator Cyr, and Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue on behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Massachusetts (NAMI Massachusetts).

NAMI Mass is a grassroots organization and our members are individuals with mental health conditions, their family members, loved ones and caregivers. One in five adults experience a mental illness, almost 44 million adults each year. In the Commonwealth, we have approximately 467,000 adults and children with severe mental illness or serious emotional disturbance.¹ As NAMI members and families, we are often the people on the front lines of dealing with our mental health system and encountering the barriers to accessing mental health services. We have a long history with the various state institutions, past and present, for individuals with behavioral health conditions and developmental disabilities.

¹ Massachusetts State Mental Health Block Grant proposal from the State Mental Health Planning Council, 2021. Data covers 2018-2019.

As a country, we are recognizing that there are many untold stories that need to come into the light. The US is not alone in this, a series of unmarked mass graves have recently been discovered in Canada. The fact that these horrific acts of abuse, neglect and hidden burials is common, does not mean they should go undocumented. In fact, how can we truly ensure a future without these horrific acts if we do not understand how they happen?

This bill provides an opportunity to go a step further than simply investigate the past. This special commission will include individuals and their families with direct, lived experience of the institutions. By elevating these voices, the commission will help dismantle the shame, stigma, and secrecy that provided the space for abuse, neglect, and mistreatment. We must no longer forget that the individuals who lived in these institutions were part of our families and communities.

This bill will give those individuals and family a voice and an understanding of their and their family's story.

We must shine the light today to avoid any similar tragedies in our present and future, as well as honoring those who died in those institutions. We do have various facilities that are open today, where our community and loved ones receive support and healing . This bill will help build the transparency, accountability and connection with the community that is needed. Documenting our past helps keep us honest in the present.

For all these reasons, NAMI Massachusetts requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on S1257 and H2090.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Monica Luke".

Monica Luke
Board Chair, Advocacy Committee
NAMI Mass Board of Directors