



Comments in Support of SB 1 and SB 221
From Chris Bouneff, Executive Director, NAMI Oregon
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Senate Human Services Committee

NAMI Oregon wishes to express its support for SB 1 and SB 221, which are companion legislation that address the significant challenges and barriers that children, youth and families with complex behavioral health needs face in Oregon

As background, NAMI Oregon is the state chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. We are a grassroots, membership-governed organization with some 2,000 members across Oregon. We provide free education and support programs to individuals and families affected by mental illness. And through our 15 local chapters, we serve about 13,000 Oregonians annually.

NAMI believes SB 1 and SB 221 are good first steps for addressing youth and families that face multi-faceted challenges that aren't easily addressed in a system that lacks programs and initiatives built to meet today's behavioral health care needs. The important and significant initial investments in services — \$40 million in total — will help families stay together whenever possible. And Oregon will finally be able to develop programs that are actually therapeutic, rather than simply custodial, with treatment goals centered on children's needs.

NAMI also highlights the leadership group that SB 1 would create — a group appointed by the governor to provide oversight and incentivize change in Oregon's system serving children and families. While new investments are vital, longer term we must aggressively address the lack of cross-system collaboration and communication that perpetuates our current failures. This leadership group provides the proper forum to tackle this issue.

NAMI cautions that this legislation alone will change very little if we do not continue to press for reforms in our broader behavioral health care system. We must do better at preventing children and families from ever reaching this level of acuity. To that end, NAMI has proposed SB 137 and accompanying amendments that will allow the health care system to intercede in the trajectory of an illness before it becomes too complex and, as a consequence, much more difficult to address.

The 2019 session has seen a plethora of other legislation that is vital to our efforts — more payer accountability, investments in crisis and peer respite, investments in housing, and investments in children and youth in educational settings. NAMI urges the Committee to join with your colleagues in health care and education in their efforts to push the state forward. Only by making concurrent policy changes and investments will we ever address the problems that plague us now.

Thank you for your time and for this opportunity to provide input. We hope the committee agrees that SB 1 and SB 221 are worthy of support.