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Senator Jeb Bradley, Chair
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Room 101, Legislative Office Building
Concord NH 03301

February 8, 2018

RE: SB 590 - making a supplemental appropriation to the state loan repayment program, relative to emergency involuntary admissions, and relative to the child protection act and making appropriations therefor.

Dear Chairman Bradley and members of the Committee:

I am testifying today on behalf of the NH Community Behavioral Health Association (CBHA), in support of SB 590. CBHA represents the state's ten community mental health centers, which provide mental health services to 50,000 adults and children annually in the state of New Hampshire.

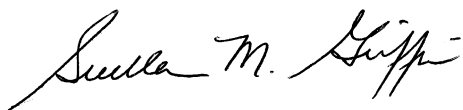
A major issue for the community mental health centers is workforce, and the very real problems we have in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. CBHA has tracked vacancies at the ten centers since December 2015. Our latest report, from November 2017, shows a total of 215 open positions, 193 of which are clinical. That is nearly a 10% vacancy rate across the system. The waits for service at these community-based services, which can have a direct impact on and exacerbate the waitlist for NH Hospital, need to be addressed sooner rather than later, so that adults and children suffering with mental illness in our state get the help they need, and deserve.

CBHA has reported on the workforce problem for at least the past two years, in letters, op eds, and in testimony on the state budget and policy bills. One solution we have promoted is additional funding to support tuition repayment for health care professionals, through the State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP). We strongly believe that the State, community health centers and community mental health centers will benefit from SB 590's provision of \$2.2 million in supplemental funding to the SLRP. This is a program that is proven to have solid results, for a very reasonable investment.

Other sections of SB 590 which CBHA wishes to highlight and urges you to approve are those which clarify conditional discharge and admission procedures for persons who are involuntarily committed under RSA 135-C. Right now, the law puts community mental health centers into a legal bind by requiring centers to sign off for individuals who are conditionally discharged under an IEA but are admitted to a facility in another location. Requiring that patients are informed of the specific DRF they will be transferred to; adding transitional housing programs as conditional discharge programs; and adding designated receiving facilities to the guardianship statute, are all important improvements to the law.

We anticipate that there may be amendments offered to SB 590 as it moves through the process. We will make ourselves available to provide your Committee with any additional information and assistance you need. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Suellen M. Griffin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Suellen M. Griffin, MSN
President, NH Community Behavioral Health Association
President/CEO, West Central Behavioral Health - Lebanon