

Senate Finance Committee

Deb Martone 271-4980

SB 114-FN-A, making appropriations to the department of health and human services to support community and transitional housing through community mental health centers.

Hearing Date: January 28, 2025

Time Opened: 2:25 p.m.

Time Closed: 2:42 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Gray, Innis, Carson, Birdsell, Pearl, Lang, Rosenwald and Watters

Bill Analysis: This bill makes appropriations to the department of health and human services for the purpose of increasing community housing options for individuals suffering from mental illness.

Sponsors:

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Ricciardi

Sen. Rosenwald

Sen. Gannon

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Sen. Innis

Rep. Newell

Rep. M. Pearson

Who supports the bill: Senators Fenton, Rosenwald, Gannon and Altschiller; Ben Bradley; Dawn McKinney; Nick Taylor; Lisa Madden; Rebecca Soule; Jonathan Day; Jake Berry; Sam Hawkins; Brodie Deshaies; Mayor Jay Kahn; Kelsey Condon; Birgit Walker; Sarah McCarthy; Brittany Eldridge; Patricia Carty; Lois Cote; Marcella Termini; Chase Eagleson; Hannah Lefler; Janelle Havens; B. Widger; Susan Paschell; Karen Trudel; Heather Fritch; Kristine Stoddard; Curtis Register.

Who is neutral on the bill: Carolyn Lewis; Kyra Leonard.

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Fenton, Prime Sponsor:

- This bill seeks to make important strides in expanding community housing options for individuals suffering from mental illness.
- SB 114-FN-A is aimed at the housing crisis for one of our most vulnerable populations, while maintaining a focus on fiscal responsibility.
- One of the key elements of DHHS' Mission Zero is to ensure robust community housing programs for those struggling with mental illness.
- This is crucial to prevent long time hospitalization and ensuring individuals can be successfully discharged into supportive communities.
- The current funding is insufficient to expand these critical services. In fact, some programs are in immediate risk of closure.

- To address this urgent issue New Hampshire Community Behavioral Health Association is proposing a 3-part approach, including one-time capital funds of \$50,000 per bed to support 30-40 beds and stabilizing or expanding housing at a one-time cost of \$1.5 million. Also, a General Fund appropriation for community supportive housing programs of \$1 million per year designed to stabilize existing supportive housing programs. These programs serve adults who can manage most daily living tasks but require assistance to live independently in the community.
- The losses across the system for supportive housing exceed \$2.5 million. This appropriation aims to offset those losses.
- With a modest investment we can propose increasing the current below rate of \$278 per day per certified community resident to a more sustainable \$350 per day. The adjustment is crucial to covering the cost of operation of these programs. The General Fund cost for this increase is \$500,000 per year which would leverage an additional \$500,000 federal matching funds.
- This is about ensuring that those who need a helping hand are not left without hope, and it is a cost effective investment in our community that we yield life-changing outcomes for individuals while addressing a growing public health concern.
- Governor Ayotte has underscored her commitment to prioritize mental health this year. Mental health is an issue that touches every family and every community in our state. SB 114-FN-A is an essential step toward addressing this need.
- By supporting this bill we are not only aligning with the Governor's priorities, but we are also affirming that mental health is health. It must be treated with the same urgency and commitment.
- Senator Fenton noted Amendment #2025-0115s tweaks some numbers. The intent of the bill remains the same, but the amendment will better reflect an effective and realistic solution.

Lisa Madden, President and CEO, Riverbend Community Mental Health, and Vice-President, Behavioral Health, Concord Hospital:

- The urgency of this bill is very much focused on the need to have individuals leave New Hampshire Hospital. On November 12, 2024, 99 of the 174 patients in New Hampshire Hospital were clinically eligible for discharge, if they had a place to go.
- This housing bill is an effort to try to sustain that continuum of care where we can have the strength of supportive housing, as well as acute care and independent housing.
- We need to sustain current services that are at risk for challenging sustainability. Riverbend invests almost \$900,000 in 2 residential programs. Manchester Mental Health invests \$675,000.
- We need the support to sustain these programs in the community.

Rebecca Soule, Program Director, Mill House:

- Ms. Soule works with Riverbend.
- The state's residential programs are underfunded and underutilized.

- This bill is a way to keep people out of New Hampshire Hospital, which is a very costly option for folks.
- At Mill House, residents have their own individual apartments. Support from mental health professionals is available in the common areas.
- Mill House helps individuals remain independent. It helps them gain skills they need to go back into the workforce part-time. They are actually learning how to handle their mental health symptoms.
- Ms. Soule shared with committee members the background of a couple of residents and the impact living at Mill House has had on their lives.
- A big part of what they do in supportive housing is to create community and the sense of feeling valued.
- Supportive housing has a positive impact.
- Increased funding for supportive housing will not only provide quality care but will reduce costs by reducing the use of more expensive services like emergency rooms and hospitals.

Jonathan Day, Mill House Resident:

- Prior to coming to Mill House, Mr. Day was battling suicide and self-harm to the point of using emergency services very frequently. He was in a very dark place. Living in residential housing has saved his life. He would not be here today if it weren't for residential treatment and programs. Help and support is always close by at Mill House.
- They are a family who need support for daily living, and are never alone.

Sam Hawkins, Public Policy Assistant, NAMI New Hampshire:

- This crisis is a key priority for NAMI New Hampshire, and despite the great strides made through Mission Zero there is more work to be done. Just yesterday there were 19 adults waiting in the emergency department for inpatient psychiatric care.
- New Hampshire must ensure that there is a wide array of community services available to meet the needs of individuals living with mental illness, including these housing programs.

Neutral Information Presented:

Carolyn Lewis, Bureau Chief, Bureau of Mental Health Services, and Kyra Leonard, DHHS:

- Housing is a key component of their service array, and has been part of the success of Mission Zero to reduce emergency department boarding, and being able to have a place for individuals to transition to after their stay at New Hampshire Hospital.
- The Department recognizes the importance of housing and is supportive of efforts to increase and expand housing for individuals in need.
- Senator Birdsell inquired if this bill was a prioritized need. Ms. Lewis indicated it was not.
- Senator Watters asked if there was any sense from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services whether or not this matched program will be

sustained. He clarified he was talking about the Medicaid reimbursement rate match. Kyra Leonard indicated it would be.

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Date Hearing Report completed: February 1, 2025