

**Testimony of Rebecca Kiessling**  
**On Behalf of NAMI Northern Virginia**  
**Virginia Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee, Northern Virginia Region**  
**January 5, 2022**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak this afternoon. My name is Rebecca Kiessling, and I am the executive director of NAMI Northern Virginia. NAMI – the National Alliance on Mental Illness – is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization. NAMI provides free advocacy, education, support, and public awareness so that all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives. NAMI Northern Virginia is the largest NAMI affiliate in the Commonwealth, serving the over 2.4 million people of Arlington, Fairfax, and Loudoun Counties, and the cities of Alexandria and Falls Church. Our programs can help you to better understand your or a loved one's mental health condition. For over 45 years, NAMI Northern Virginia has been the leading local voice of lived experience. We understand because we've been there too. Today we have heard from many representatives of our area's community services boards. I speak today on behalf of the lived experience, those with mental illness and their family members. I myself am both a peer and family member, and a resident of Northern Virginia for over 20 years.

The work of our public behavioral health system – our Region 2 Community Services Boards – in Northern Virginia are essential to addressing the mental health needs of our neighbors. There has been a 66 percent decrease in the number of insured in our region. The same region where over 750,000 adults or 39 percent of the population have mental health needs and where 200,000 adults have a serious mental illness. With so many barriers to care, without the services our CSBs provide, our community members cannot receive the crisis services they need.

The percent of people nationally in locally run jails who have been diagnosed with a mental disorder is an incredible 44 percent. But our local CSBs are working to change how those with a mental illness are treated during a crisis, providing treatment during stays, and alternatives to minimize repeated trauma. Alexandria's Reentry Council, Fairfax County's Diversion First, Arlington County's Behavioral Health Docket – these are just some of the programs working in our community to help individuals with mental illness get the help they need and NOT be forgotten in our criminal justice system.

Judy is a NAMI Northern Virginia member. She said to me:

*I have always lived in Fairfax County, my whole life. And I didn't know anything about the CSB until my son became part of the system. The crisis response units, the people that understand that he needs help, not lock up. My son is alive – he is really thriving right now – because of our CSB and the public services in our community. MCRC, MCU, the mental health docket – we know them all. And are grateful.*

Just in Fairfax/Falls Church CSB last year– more than 20,000 individuals received mental health, substance use disorder, or developmental disability) services. 6,500 individuals received CSB emergency services. All of this with a forty percent turnover in staff.

Northern Virginia CSBs are more than half funded by local funds. Historical issues with inadequate state funding levels for our CSBs have hampered full implementation of vital services, like with STEP Virginia. And on behalf of those that live with mental illness, I implore you to understand how critical we – those with mental illness and their family members – feel it is to encourage the full funding of our CSB initiatives, including Marcus Alert, mobile crisis response units, 23 hours stabilization units and crisis receiving centers, adequate inpatient hospital beds, and competitive workforce retention.

With the Governor's focus on mental health and the overwhelming need brought on by the pandemic, you have the opportunity to help Judy, her son, and the 750,000 people like him that may need CSB assistance.