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December 2, 2015

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Governor Cuomo,

I am writing to express the support of the National Alliance on Mental Illness-New York State (NAMI-NYS) for bill A.836/S.663- An act to amend the correction law, in relation to training for staff in residential mental health treatment unit programs inside correctional facilities.

NAMI-NYS strongly supports this much needed initiative. Today, jails and prisons are replacing the asylums of yesterday as the most likely destination for people living with a severe mental illness. NAMI-NYS is concerned about the welfare of the estimated 60% of the correction system population who are suffering from a mental illness. Conditions inside prisons and jails are difficult for anyone but certainly pose unique challenges for people who have psychiatric disorders. Tragically, as the bill details suicide within the corrections system have reached alarming levels.

It is obvious a greater comprehension of the distinctive issues that impact people living with a mental illness is needed for correctional staff that directly interacts with inmates with psychiatric disabilities. Providing training for all correction officers, program service staff and mental health and medical staff with direct inmate contact can produce a better understanding of their specialized needs and lead to better outcomes. Improved knowledge can contribute to a reduction in harm to correction staff and inmates, a reduction in suicide rates in prison as well as more successful reintegration into the community following their sentences.

NAMI-NYS is grateful our legislators recognize the need for these necessary reforms and we hope you do as well. This is why I urge you to help create a more mentally healthy and just New York State and sign A.836/S.663 into law.

Sincerely,

Wendy Burch
Executive Director