

National Alliance on Mental Illness of Massachusetts Testimony

March 20, 2007

Dear Members of the Joint Committee On Bonding, Capital Expenditures And State Assets:

NAMI-Mass, the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Massachusetts is a statewide education, support and advocacy group for those with mental illness and their families. I am here today to express **NAMI-Mass' SUPPORT for House Bill 37, "An act facilitating the development of underutilized properties formerly operated by DMH or DMR for supported housing for people deemed eligible for services by DMH or DMR."**

Every day, the NAMI-Mass helpline receives calls from family members and consumers across the state who are *desperate* to find resources to help them access affordable housing. The majority of DMH clients are far below the poverty level, placing them among those most gravely affected by the Commonwealth's affordable housing crisis. The creation of affordable housing is absolutely critical if consumers of DMH services are to be given an opportunity to live healthy and productive lives.

We must increase community-based services for individuals with serious psychiatric conditions whose lives depend upon residential, community support services and at times acute services. Roughly **20,000** chronically mentally ill individuals are desperately waiting for DMH services, of which over **3,645** of them are waiting for residential placement. Safe and affordable housing for the mentally ill is crucial for recovery. State hospitals were originally intended to serve the mentally ill, and with the advent of more cost effective, humane, community-based services, it is now possible to consolidate hospitals and save valuable tax dollars. Housing for the mentally ill must be established when state surplus land use legislation is passed. When we as a society choose to provide housing opportunities for our most vulnerable members, everyone benefits. Individuals are stabilized, there is a decrease in the use of expensive emergency services, and the community fabric is strengthened. Affordable housing is good for individuals, and it is good for society. **The families of NAMI-Mass respectfully urge the Members of the Joint Committee On Bonding, Capital Expenditures And State Assets to report HB 37 FAVORABLY out of committee.** Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Toby Fisher MBA/MSW
Executive Director