Good morning. My name is Greg Hansch. I serve as Executive Director of NAMI Texas, the Texas Affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

I’m here today primarily to thank you for your ongoing prioritization of mental health as a critical issue in the state of Texas. This committee’s work to address mental health has resulted in profound improvements that have made recovery possible, supported Texans in times of great need, and prevented downstream costs. Furthermore, the All Texas Access Initiative discussed in committee yesterday provides a framework for regional collaboration among the Local Mental Health Authorities, thereby promoting efficiencies and service improvements in community-based services. We deeply appreciate your efforts to address mental health in past sessions. And once again, the Senate appropriations bill is strong on mental health, which is so critical in this time as our state encounters rapidly growing demand due to COVID-19 and other factors.

In SB 1, we support the continuation of funding for community mental health services, crisis services, and grant programs. There is now broad awareness that cuts to the mental health system do not lead to cost savings. Instead, the burden falls to local taxpayers, and leads to increased rates of incarceration, public hospital emergency rooms admissions, and homeless services. Thank you for preserving core services in SB 1. When you continue to fund initiatives like the community mental health matching grant program, you will continue to see successful prevention of adverse events, improved school performance, and a strengthened continuum of care. A new initiative in SB 1, Peer-to-Peer Counseling for Law Enforcement Officers, would leverage the unique value of lived experience to protect the health and wellbeing of those whom we all rely on for our public safety.
Other NAMI Texas staff will share with you the need for investments in the state hospital system, competency restoration, peer services, housing, and innovative early intervention programming.

I’d like to request your consideration of two items that are not currently included in SB 1. First, please consider providing funding to implement a collaborative care benefit in Medicaid. The primary care system tends to be ill-equipped to address the mental health needs of clients, and yet it is one of the most likely settings for identification of mental illness. Please integrate mental health services into primary care. By establishing a collaborative care benefit in Medicaid, Texas will save lives lost to suicide and overdose, facilitate recovery, and prevent downstream costs.

Finally, please consider including a cost-neutral budget rider that directs HHSC to study the adequacy and efficacy of existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline infrastructure in Texas to determine state preparedness to comply with federal National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020. This designates 9-8-8 as the three-digit designated number to access the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) across the United States, effective Summer 2022. It is critical to ensure that Texas is prepared for this substantial change to system that we have in place to handle mental health emergency calls.

Thank you very much for your dedicated service. I would be happy to take any questions that you may have.