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MEDIA STATEMENT**NAMI Greater Houston Meets with District Attorney's Office
over Rape Victim Case**

HOUSTON (July 28, 2016) – Leaders of NAMI Greater Houston, the Houston area affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, met yesterday with representatives of the Harris County district attorney's office to address the issues raised by the recent jailing of a rape victim who lives with mental illness.

Following the meeting, Glenn Urbach, executive director of NAMI Greater Houston, said: "We had a very productive discussion with the district attorney's office. Our goal was to understand how the safety nets that should have prevented the re-victimization of a rape survivor failed her and failed our community. More important, we wanted to start working with the DA's office to find ways to prevent this from happening again. Based on our meeting, we are confident that we can work together to not only prevent a re-occurrence, but to identify and develop best practices in the area of working with crime victims who experience mental illness.

"Over the past decade, Houston and Harris County have worked to improve services for people with mental illness who encounter the criminal justice system. They have embedded mental health professionals within the jail system and implemented nationally recognized crisis response training programs within the Houston Police Department and Harris County Sheriff's Department. Mental health courts and jail diversion programs have made a positive difference in the lives of individuals whose mental illness brought them in contact with law enforcement. However, more needs to be done.

"Our discussion helped us better appreciate the extreme challenges this situation offered, and the limitations within which the district attorney's office was operating. It was clear to us that the assistant district attorney involved made extensive efforts to find a solution. But in this instance, the safeguards that should have protected the victim were not enough. While we do not condone the actions that were taken, we understand to a certain degree how they occurred.

“The district attorney’s office acknowledged that the jailing of a rape victim living with mental illness reflects both systemic deficiencies and a lack of knowledge within the criminal justice system on how to work with witnesses who are experiencing a mental health crisis. Based on our experience helping individuals and families cope with mental illness, NAMI identified some options that could be pursued in a similar situation in the future. We plan to work with the district attorney’s office to identify additional procedure changes, training and policy changes – whether at the local level or on a broader level – to fix the loopholes that allowed this to happen. We commend the district attorney’s office for its sincere commitment to develop new answers that represent best practices in mental illness and victim’s rights, and we look forward to working side by side with them to accomplish this.”

NAMI Greater Houston (www.namigreaterhouston.org), an affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is a grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of persons living with mental illness and their families. Since 1988, NAMI Greater Houston has offered free education classes, support groups and community outreach programs throughout the greater Houston area.

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