April 10, 2020

NAMI
4301 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Chair of Elections,

NAMI South Dakota is proud to nominate Wizipan Little Elk as a candidate for the 2020 NAMI Board, as verified in NAMI South Dakota Board Meeting Minutes of April 8, 2020.

Wizipan Little Elk is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and a nationally recognized young Native leader and is seeking to serve as a NAMI Board Member. We are in support of his nomination and wish to provide you with the following information with respect to his diverse professional background and why NAMI South Dakota feels he would make an excellent board member.

Wizipan became active in South Dakota’s 2004 U.S. Senate race, working with Four Directions to help deliver record-breaking levels of Native voter turnout. Wizipan later joined Senator Barack Obama’s campaign for President as Native American Outreach Coordinator. He was then promoted to a position as the campaign’s national First Americans Vote director. After the successful campaign, Wizipan was named First Americans Public Liaison for the Obama transition team. He later became deputy chief of staff to the United States Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs. In 2011, Wizipan returned home, where he became Director of the Office of Analysis for the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, and then CEO of the Rosebud Economic Development Corporation. Wizipan earned his B.A. from Yale University and his Juris Doctorate in Indian Law from the University of Arizona’s James E. Rogers College of Law.

Wizipan Little Elk’s leadership strengths align with NAMI’s 2020 Call for Candidates. The Board of NAMI South Dakota is confident that, given his education, legal and political background, corporate experience and personal gifts, Wizipan brings important capacities in financial oversight and management, plus legal understanding, particularly in racial relations and human resource development and sustainability models. He has built a broad network of regional and national connections that would help inform NAMI’s path going forward. His personal and professional strengths would contribute significantly to the NAMI board’s vision and leadership.

As CEO of the Rosebud Economic Development Corporation, the economic development arm of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Wizipan recognized that the major barriers to workforce retention and success were not work-related factors, but rather, a lack of mental health supports and social-emotional intelligence education. He began implementing organizational practices that would
contribute to long-term success by educating workers on mental health, addressing stigma, helping employees to access care and provide for sustainable solutions. Under Wizipan’s leadership, REDCO has integrated a culture of healing. He has become a crusader for helping people reach their whole potential through social-emotional and personal healing initiatives. His knowledge of traditional indigenous beliefs and practices informs and guides all he does to promote healing for all people.

As an active NAMI state organization, with a highly visible and ever-expanding community presence in a geographically and ethnically diverse state, NAMI South Dakota is dedicated to supporting the mission of NAMI, for the benefit and advancement of all affiliates and state organizations. We believe Wizipan Little Elk brings an important voice and vision to NAMI in a period of unprecedented national need for mental health supports, compassion and understanding.

We thank you for the opportunity to nominate Wizipan Little Elk as a 2020 Candidate to the NAMI Board of Directors.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Lueth
NAMI South Dakota Board President