



A better tomorrow starts **today.**

SUBSTANCE USE	MENTAL HEALTH
OUTPATIENT	RESIDENTIAL

January 24, 2024

Testimony In support of LD 2105: *Resolve, to Protect and Enhance Access to Behavioral Health Services in Androscoggin County and Surrounding Communities*

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 2105. My name is Greg Bowers, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Day One, an organization that has provided substance use and mental health treatment to adolescents and families in Maine for the past 50 years. Throughout much of its history, and continuing today, Day One has provided residential treatment for adolescent boys and girls suffering from acute substance use disorder. For nearly 10 years now, we have been the only provider in the State offering this critical level of care for young people and as such, we serve youth from every part of our State.

While the impact of St. Mary's behavioral health services to the overall health of the greater Androscoggin region is likely clear to everyone here, I would like to speak to the increasing role that we see St. Mary's playing in addressing the significant mental health and substance use crisis facing our young people today. St. Mary's adolescent inpatient psychiatric unit, its behavioral health emergency department that is capable of serving youth, and their acumen in addiction medicine, all represent a significant State-wide resource that in our view, can't be put at risk at a time when the need for such services is routinely outpacing our collective ability to meet it.

It's likely no surprise to any of us here that our youth are far more at risk today from the impacts of mental health and substance use disorder than any other time in our history – environmental stressors, COVID related shutdowns, social media, increased access to substances, increased lethality, or potency of substances, all contribute to this hard fact. Even though we seem to have gotten accustomed to hearing of and talking about the opioid related death toll, it always hits us differently when we hear of a teenager falling victim. The fact is that often times, and with increasing frequency, the mental health and substance use treatment needs of our youth become so urgent and so acute in nature, that they need immediate medical intervention.



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This is where local, accessible treatment is so critical, and this is where St. Mary's has become such a vital partner in Day One's effort to respond to the increasing levels of youth addiction in our communities.

The treatment needs of the adolescents coming to Day One's programs have gotten increasingly complex in the past two years – more active use, more dangerous substances, and more mental health concerns. Whereas three years ago the need for medically supervised withdrawal services (or detox services) for youth was just beginning to surface, it is now at the very least a consideration that must be made in every residential assessment we do. Given that Day One does not have the medical capabilities needed to safely supervise the withdrawal from many of the substances being actively used by our clients, we needed a medical partner that was in close proximity to our residential programs and that was willing to provide this critical level of care at a time when their own resources were likely already being stretched. St. Mary's health system immediately engaged us in communication and quickly became that partner. In essence, the ability to access these services at St. Mary's, has now provided Day One the ability to take on the most urgent and life-threatening cases that would have otherwise been outside of our ability to help.

While the protocols regarding the clinical "hand-offs" of these complex cases have just recently been developed, they have already been put to use in several recent admissions to our residential programs. It is comforting to know that we have a partner that is able to provide this urgent care for our clients when needed and without hesitation. Our hope is that access to acute adolescent mental health and substance use care will continue to grow as does the need and that adequate funding will be available for this purpose.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,
Gregory Bowers
Chief Executive Officer