



A better tomorrow starts **today.**

SUBSTANCE USE    MENTAL HEALTH  
OUTPATIENT       RESIDENTIAL

**February 21, 2023**

**Testimony In Support of LD 258:** *An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024, and June 30, 2025*

Good afternoon, Senators Rotundo and Baldacci, Representatives Sachs and Meyer, and members of both the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. 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 for well over forty years.

I am here today to express Day One's strong support for the proposed biennium budget now being reviewed by your committees. This budget represents a significant investment in a behavioral health system of care that has undergone many years of underfunding, leading to program closures, extended waitlists, rationing of care, and the inappropriate use of hospital emergency departments and correctional systems.

Day One's mission is to treat adolescents and families who are struggling with substance use and mental health disorders. Day One not only saves lives, but it also works to secure the future of our young people and to break the generational cycle of addiction that we are all too familiar with. We do this work by intervening as early as possible and in settings where we have access to those in need, whether in schools, teen centers, or other familiar settings in the community.

It's no secret that the need for youth services has increased significantly since the start of the pandemic, you see evidence of it every week in the news. As of just last Friday, Day One had 106 youth on its waitlist for outpatient counseling and 21 for our residential substance use program. The \$213 million of funding attached to this budget to maintain the January 2023 rate increases made in many core mental health and substance use services will not only enable us to maintain our services, but also gives us the opportunity to increase our wages and benefits to hire more counselors to address our waitlists. I do not hesitate to say that the very existence of these services would be in jeopardy if these new rates could not be maintained.

To illustrate the value of these services and the importance of supporting the aforementioned rate increases, I asked one of our clinicians to share a recent experience:

*I am working with a 14-year-old white female in 8th grade who was referred by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade principal after admitting to and being suspended for possession of marijuana at school in October. Client reported use of weed starting in 7th grade to avoid feeling empty especially over the summer and to now finding it difficult to stop.*

*Less than two weeks after initial suspension, the student was suspended again for smoking weed in the bathroom at school. I was able to meet with client the day of the second suspension before her parents picked her up and she opened up to me about using weed to reduce her thoughts of self-harm. Client and clinician met with her parents when they arrived, and she was able to share with them her struggles with self-harm. With Day One present in the school, a clinician was able to support a very upset student on the day of her suspension, provide safe space for her to talk about her reasons for substance use, and support her as she communicated her self harm struggles to her parents.*

I am hopeful that this budget signals a turning point by not only restoring what has been lost, but in also beginning a trend in continued investment in clinical innovation and program growth. To truly meet the treatment needs of our youth, school-based services need to be bolstered, primary and family care practices need access to trained youth specialists, and intensive treatment models need to be brought into our communities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.