



The Jed Foundation

February 16, 2023

Chair Aileen Gunther and Chair Samra Brouk
House and Senate Committees on Mental Health

Chair Aileen Gunther and Chair Samra Brouk:

My name is John MacPhee, CEO of [The Jed Foundation \(JED\)](https://www.jedfoundation.org/), a non-profit organization, based in New York City, that partners with high schools and colleges to help them strengthen their programs, policies and systems to protect student emotional health and reduce risks for suicide.

Navigating the complexities of today's world as a young person is challenging. With many young people spending most of their time in the school system, juggling between the demands of school, the weight of the pressures fueled by social media, and the typical, everyday growing pains that come with maturing into adulthood, it can all feel overwhelming. And in the last couple of years, that already rocky terrain was further complicated by the pandemic.

Unfortunately, following accidents, suicide is the second leading cause of death for 10 to 34 year olds ([CDC Wonder, 2021](https://www.cdc.gov/wonder/)). In 2021, 22% of high school students seriously considered attempting suicide and 10% attempted suicide one or more times during the past year ([CDC YRBS, 2021](https://www.cdc.gov/yrbbs/)). According to the [2022 Spring National College Health Assessment published by American College Health Association \(ACHA\)](https://www.acha.org/), 10.9% of college students had self injured within the past 12 months (meaning that they had intentionally cut, burned, bruised, or otherwise injured themselves); 51.9% scored positive for loneliness, and 75.0% reported moderate to serious psychological distress.

New York Must Invest in Mental Health

We applaud Governor Kathy Hochul's \$1 billion multi-year plan to overhaul the continuum of mental health care, expand school-based mental health clinics, and reduce the number of individuals with unmet mental health needs across New York. We encourage the Committee on Mental Hygiene to continue to make significant investments in school-based mental health by ensuring that all New York schools have comprehensive mental health and suicide prevention plans in place to address the needs of their students. In addition to the expansion of school-based mental health clinics, academic institutions need to take a comprehensive approach to addressing students' wellbeing through strategic planning and equitable implementation. On a bipartisan basis, the federal government has increased investments in

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Garrett Lee Smith and Project AWARE programs. Our state must also on a bipartisan basis make a direct investment in our youth's future.

JED is equipped to assist academia with the tools they need to accomplish those goals. Our [research and evidence-based approach](#) has proven that when schools do comprehensive planning, they are significantly more likely to have made specific changes in approach, programming, policies, and support for mental health and suicide prevention that address health promotion and prevention, early intervention, access to care, crisis intervention, substance misuse, and safety measures for students.

Nationwide, JED has worked with over 400 universities and colleges, and in 2021, we began working with high schools. Approximately 50 New York high schools and colleges are part of our network. We take pride in our home state of New York as being a leader in this space and stand ready as a resource to the Legislature as it moves forward on this important initiative. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us for more information and data on the effectiveness of comprehensive programs—these programs can truly make a lifesaving difference for youth.

Finally, JED urges the Committee to not overlook the opportunity that academic institutions can play in creating communities of caring for New York students, where they can be supported, learn the skills to navigate mental health challenges, and be noticed and connected to care if they are struggling. Thank you for supporting youth mental health and for prioritizing programs that have a proven track record of enhancing mental health and suicide prevention.

Sincerely,
John MacPhee

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