

February 7, 2023

**House Health and Government Operations Committee  
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

*HB 271 988 Trust Fund – Funding*

EveryMind, a nonprofit organization, strengthens communities and empowers individuals to reach optimal mental wellness. EveryMind has positively impacted the mental health and wellness of children, youth, adults, veterans, and families in Maryland for more than 65 years. Based in Rockville, EveryMind offers community education, like evidence-based Mental Health First Aid training and implements programs for community members in every stage of life. EveryMind is one of the centers that has answered the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – now the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline – since 2005. We staff the Hotline with trained counselors who provide supportive listening, information and resources, and crisis intervention through phone, text, and chat services.

**EveryMind is pleased to support HB 271 988 Trust Fund – Funding.** This bill provides much needed additional funding for the 988 Trust Fund to support reliable planning and capacity building for the Maryland members of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline network.

Last year, Maryland established the 988 Trust Fund and dedicated funding for 988 Lifeline centers for essentially the first time. This funding was critical to support Maryland's transition to 988, the first nationwide three-digit access code for suicidal and behavioral health crisis calls, texts, and chats. The hotlines that make up Maryland's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline network have provided free, 24/7 support and safety planning to residents for decades. The increased volume and visibility associated with the transition to 988 demands new and continued state investment. Maryland communities need mental health and emotional support more than ever and investing in the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a critical way to provide that support.

Demand for EveryMind's Hotline services increased 44% for calls, 500% for texts, and nearly 200% for chats compared to the same time last year. In the first six months since the 988 launch, we received 13,474 contacts overall. Much of that demand is from youth ages 24 and younger. To meet the increased need, our Crisis Hotline Counselors receive training in mental health, suicide prevention, emergency intervention, and safety planning, as well as the needs of communities that are at higher risk of suicide such as LGBTQIA+, older adults, and people of color. We are hiring 50 new Hotline positions to help meet the demand for mental health crisis services and to make sure we are there when someone reaches out. EveryMind is accredited by the American Association of Suicidology and understands how the services provided on the 988 Lifeline save lives and keep our friends and neighbors out of the hospital, jail, and even the morgue. Since July our interactions resolved 95% of the time without further intervention. Our support is not only vital – it saves money for the County, the State, and constituents.

Maryland can build on its solid foundation to create the robust 988 Lifeline network that will keep residents safe and well, but continued investment is needed. **EveryMind urges House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 271.**