

January 17, 2023

Maryland Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

SB 3 988 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 the evidence-based Mental Health First Aid training and implements various programs and direct services for every stage of life from youth to older adults. This includes operation of the 24/7 hotline in Montgomery County. We are one of the centers that has answered the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – now 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - since 2005. We are staffed by trained Hotline counselors that provide supportive listening, information and resources, and crisis intervention (including suicide assessments) through phone, text, and chat services. Our hotline is one of eight 988 Lifeline centers in Maryland and one of only three that offer text and chat services.

EveryMind is pleased to support SB 3 988 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 and texts. 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 call 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.

We continue to see the need for 988 as demand for our services is now triple the calls, texts, and chats we saw during the same time last year. 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, intervention, and safety planning, as well as the needs of communities that are at higher risk of suicide such as the LGBTQIA+, older adults, and people of color. We are hiring new Hotline positions to help us meet the demand for suicide prevention services and to make sure we are there when someone reaches out. As a center accredited by the American Association of Suicidology, EveryMind 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. Our support is not only vital – it is money saving to the County, the State, and constituents.

Maryland can build on its foundation to create the robust 988 Lifeline network that will keep residents safe and well, but continued investment is needed. **EveryMind urges the Senate Budget & Tax Committee to pass SB 3.**