

House Health and Government Operations Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

HB 933 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—988 Trust Fund Fees

Chair Pena-Melnyk and esteemed members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. My name is Ann Mazur, and I am honored to serve as CEO of EveryMind, a nonprofit organization with over 65 years of dedicated experience providing vital mental health education and support services to communities across Maryland.

EveryMind is proud to be one of Maryland's 8 Call Centers, answering the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, now the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, since 2005, and offering text and chat services since 2012.

As you all are aware, HB 933 proposes to establish a critical and sustainable funding mechanism through a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee, modeled after Maryland's successful 911 funding structure. This funding is essential to support a wide range of critical activities, including comprehensive training for call center staff, technological infrastructure updates, and capacity expansion to meet the anticipated increase in call volume. Moreover, funds are crucial to supporting outreach and education efforts to raise awareness about the 988 number and its availability to those in need.

The establishment of this sustainable funding mechanism is imperative for EveryMind to continue recruiting full-time paid Crisis Hotline Counselors. While we still rely on volunteers and part-time staff, having full-time counselors ensures more stable and consistent coverage. Our answer rate for 988 calls was an impressive 90-95% for the first half of FY24.

Additionally, this funding is essential to maintaining our comprehensive onboarding training for new Crisis Hotline Counselors. With this funding, we can provide longer and more robust training to our staff, resulting in a training completion rate of 100% for the first time in October 2023. Furthermore, our retention rate for counselors doubled when comparing the first six months of 2023 to the second six months of the calendar year.

Furthermore, this funding is vital to ensure our new cloud-based phone system remains state-of-the-art, guaranteeing its reliability and providing EveryMind with vital insight into call volume and service level data.

Lastly, this funding will help us sustain a Hotline management team dedicated specifically to quality assurance, training, and workforce management. These efforts are crucial for monitoring and ensuring higher quality service.

EveryMind strongly urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to support HB 933, as it will save lives. Thank you for your time.