

February 28, 2024

House Health and Government Operations Committee

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

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

My name is Henriot St. Gerard, and I proudly serve as a Board Member at EveryMind, a nonprofit dedicated to providing crucial mental health education and support services across Maryland for over 65 years. EveryMind operates as a primary Call Center and a key provider of text and chat services, responding swiftly to those in crisis since 2005.

Today, I advocate for HB 933, which aims to establish a permanent funding source for the 988 Trust Fund, vital for sustaining and enhancing the 988 helpline in Maryland. Despite the establishment of the 988 Trust Fund in 2022, the absence of a permanent funding source poses a significant challenge. HB 933 proposes a solution through a \$0.25 per month 988 telecom fee, projected to generate \$15-20 million annually, essential for supporting operations, technology upgrades, and service expansions.

The statistics speak volumes about the urgency of this matter. Attempted suicide rates among high school students, particularly among females, black teens, and LGBTQ+ teens, are alarmingly high. More than 20% of teens have seriously considered suicide, with even higher rates among LGBTQ+ youth. Moreover, older adults and veterans are disproportionately affected, with suicide rates higher than the general population. These figures underscore the critical need for increased support, resources, and interventions to address the concerning rise in suicide rates among vulnerable populations.

While EveryMind has made strides in expanding crisis response services, sustainable funding is imperative to maintain and enhance our efforts. As a Board Member of EveryMind and a concerned citizen deeply committed to the well-being of our youth and mental health advocacy, **I urge the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 933.** Let's ensure that Marylanders, particularly our vulnerable youth, can access lifesaving support through the 988 Lifeline. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Henriot St.Gerard
Board Member, EveryMind