

Testimony in Support of HB 284 – Education- Provision of Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline Telephone Number - Alteration

January 31, 2024

Ways and Means Committee Chair Atterbeary and esteemed members of the Committee,

My name is Alyssa Sanders, and I am the Director of Advocacy for EveryMind, a nonprofit with over 65 plus years providing mental health education and support services to Maryland. I am here today to share that EveryMind strongly supports HB 284, Education- Provision of Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline Telephone Number – Alteration, proposed by Delegate Palakovich-Carr. This bill would update school materials with the year and half old 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, a crucial step towards addressing mental health crises among middle and high school students.

EveryMind is the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline call center for Montgomery County and the backup center for Prince George’s County. We are also one of three centers who respond to chats and texts sent to 988 from across Maryland. In the past six months we answered 4,153 chats and 7,297 texts on 988 from across the nation, 63% of these chats were from people 24 and under and 58% of the texts were from the same age group.

This bill would require every school district to include the phone number for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in their middle and high school handbooks and student IDs. This simple yet impactful initiative could potentially save lives by ensuring that this necessary resource is readily available to students who may be having a difficult day and need someone confidential to talk to or may be experiencing a mental health crisis or contemplating suicide.

As we are all aware, there has been a great increase in mental health challenges among our youth. Adolescence can be a tumultuous time, and many students may grapple with stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues. They may also worry about the consequences of reaching out to someone they know. The pandemic magnified and exacerbated these issues.

By adding the 988 Lifeline information into school materials, we send a powerful message that mental health matters, and help is one quick message or phone call away. Students facing mental health struggles often feel isolated or unsure of where to turn and having the 988 Lifeline number easily accessible could be a pivotal resource in times of crisis.

The inclusion of 988 Lifeline information on student IDs ensures that students always carry this essential resource with them. In moments of discomfort or distress, having the lifeline number on their ID can serve as a constant reminder that support is within reach, fostering a sense of security and encouraging those in need to reach out for help.

This bill aligns with our shared commitment to prioritize the mental health and well-being of our youth. It represents a proactive step towards creating a safer and more supportive environment for students, helping to reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health assistance.

Thank you for your time and consideration.