

EveryMind Testimony in Support of House Bill 141: Task Force on Loneliness and Isolation January 30, 2025

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Alyssa Sanders, and I am the Advocacy Director at EveryMind, an organization dedicated to promoting mental wellness and providing critical support services to individuals across Maryland. I am writing to express support for House Bill 141, which establishes the State Task Force on Loneliness and Isolation.

Loneliness and social isolation are public health challenges that affect individuals across all age groups, socioeconomic statuses, and geographic locations. Research has shown that chronic loneliness can have profound impacts on mental and physical health, including increased risks of depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, and even premature mortality. In fact, in 2023 the U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness and social isolation a public health epidemic, emphasizing the urgent need for coordinated, systemic action.

House Bill 141 takes an important step in addressing this issue by convening a diverse group of stakeholders to evaluate the causes of loneliness and isolation and recommend actionable solutions. Specifically, the Task Force will:

1. **Examine Root Causes:** By identifying the factors contributing to loneliness and isolation, the Task Force will provide a clearer picture of the problem and its impact on Marylanders.
2. **Promote Community-Based Solutions:** Recommendations to enhance local activities and in-person gatherings can foster social connections and strengthen community ties.
3. **Develop Innovative Approaches:** Exploring municipal-based social connection committees offers a unique opportunity to create sustainable, localized strategies for combatting isolation.

At EveryMind, we have seen firsthand the devastating effects of loneliness and isolation through our crisis prevention and intervention services, including the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Many of the individuals we serve report feelings of disconnection, underscoring the critical need for systemic interventions to rebuild social networks and foster meaningful connections.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 141 and look forward to supporting the Task Force's work in the years to come.