

Testimony in Opposition to HB 1305: Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports- Workgroup and Study

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Alyssa Sanders, and I serve as the Advocacy Director at EveryMind, a nonprofit organization that has provided critical mental health support and services in Maryland for over 65 years. Our mission is rooted in ensuring that individuals and communities have access to the mental health resources they need to thrive.

Today, I am writing to express strong opposition to HB 1305- Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports Workgroup and Study. We have received grant funding through this program to provide much-needed school-based mental health services in seven schools across Prince George's County and have already begun to see the difference it is making for the schools' students, families, and communities. Removing this funding would undermine our progress in addressing mental health challenges and increase long-term costs, placing an undue burden on our community and state resources.

It is essential to understand that effective therapy and mental health support take time, especially in school settings. Students struggling with mental health challenges often face significant barriers to success, such as trauma, family instability, or difficulty coping with academic or social pressure. Programs like ours are uniquely and carefully designed to foster those trusting relationships, creating a foundation for individuals to work toward self-sufficiency, resiliency, and growth. The trust-building process is often slow, requiring repeated interactions, support, and encouragement. Without sufficient time and resources dedicated to developing these relationships, students are less likely to fully engage in their treatment and the potential for meaningful change diminishes.

School-based mental health services are particularly effective because they allow for consistency in support. However, without sustained funding, students may never get the chance to build that trust with the professionals who could help them. Take for example Melanie, a high school student struggling in class. She was anxious, quiet, and not engaged with her peers. A teacher realized that Melanie needed more support and referred her to a Therapeutic Mentor. Over weeks of slowly building trust and discovering Melanie's love of art, the relationship began to flourish and started pushing Melanie to be more confident and comfortable in her own skin. Recently, Melanie visited her Mentor and disclosed that she felt more capable of speaking up in class and sharing stories with her family and peers.

Cutting funding to Consortium funded programs would have far-reaching consequences for both students and families. Without this support, we are likely to see:

1. **Increased Behavioral Issues and Academic Struggles:** Mental health issues can significantly impact a student's ability to focus, engage, and succeed in school. Without access to consistent mental health support, students may begin to act out in the classroom or fall behind academically.

2. **Greater Burden on Families:** Without school-based mental health services, parents and caregivers may be forced to navigate the mental health system on their own -- spending time, energy, and resources they may not have available to them.
3. **Increased Costs in the Future:** Without preventative mental health services in schools, we are setting students up for more significant challenges down the road. These challenges often manifest in higher rates of absenteeism, poor academic performance, and more consistent behavioral issues. As these problems grow, students may require more intensive or costly care down the line.
4. **Higher Rates of Disengagement:** When students do not have the mental health support their need, they may become disengaged or drop out of school. This creates long-term consequences as these students' become adults that may struggle to find stable employment or be a productive member of their community.

As presented, HB 1305 would undermine the essential work of EveryMind and organizations like ours, setting back Maryland's progress in mental health care and putting thousands of vulnerable residents—especially youth—at risk.

Investing in school-based mental health services means more students thrive—academically, socially, and emotionally—while reducing long-term costs of untreated mental health conditions.

Thank you for your time and leadership on this issue.