

## Testimony in Support of HB387: The Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act

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

Good afternoon,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB387, which seeks to expand critical funding for school-based mental health services. My name is Alyssa Sanders, and I am the Advocacy Director at EveryMind, a trusted nonprofit organization that has been providing mental health support and services in Maryland for over 65 years.

At EveryMind, we have witnessed firsthand the life-changing impact of school-based mental health services. Currently, we operate in over 35 schools across Maryland, 7 of which receive funding through the Coordinated Community Supports Partnership Funds. These services ensure that students facing challenges such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and family instability have access to the care they need, right where they learn.

The need for school-based mental health services has never been greater. Nationally, 1 in 7 children (3 to 17 years of age) struggles with a mental health issue, and according to Maryland's own Youth Risk Behavior Survey, rates of depression and anxiety among students have risen sharply in recent years. Schools are uniquely positioned to address this crisis, serving as a safe and accessible environment for students to receive support. By embedding mental health professionals in schools, we reduce barriers such as stigma, transportation, and cost, ensuring students receive timely care.

Through our work at EveryMind, we've seen how transformative these services can be. For example:

- **A middle school student** who was struggling with depression after the death of a parent was able to meet weekly with one of our licensed clinicians. Over time, they learned coping strategies, re-engaged with their schoolwork, and began participating in extracurricular activities.
- **A high school student**, referred for chronic absenteeism, worked with a clinician to address anxiety and family challenges. With this support, their attendance and grades improved, and they gained tools to manage stress that will benefit them for years to come.

HB387 will allow programs like these to reach students in need, ensuring equitable access to mental health care across Maryland. EveryMind's clinicians not only provide individual counseling but also engage families, train teachers, and work collaboratively with school staff to foster a culture of wellness. The ripple effect of these services extends beyond the individual student, strengthening entire school communities.

We urge this committee to support HB387 because investing in school-based mental health services is an investment in the future of Maryland's youth. Funding for this program ensures that more students will thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, while reducing long-term costs associated with untreated mental health issues.

EveryMind is proud to be a part of this work and ready to expand our impact in partnership with the state. Thank you for your leadership on this issue, and I respectfully request a favorable report on HB387.