

Testimony in Support of HB 414 – Digital Social Media Services and the Mental Health Care Fund for Children and Youth
January 30, 2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 414, which establishes the Mental Health Care Fund for Children and Youth. This legislation represents a critical investment in addressing the escalating mental health crisis among Maryland's children and youth by improving access to essential mental health care services.

My name is Alyssa Sanders, and I serve as the Advocacy Director at EveryMind, one of Maryland's leading nonprofit mental health organizations. EveryMind has been a cornerstone of community mental health for over 65 years, providing direct services, education, and advocacy to promote mental wellness for all ages.

EveryMind has deep expertise in children's mental health. We provide school-based mental health services in over 35 schools in Maryland, delivering care that is accessible, timely, and responsive to the unique needs of children and families.

The demand for children's mental health services in Maryland has never been greater. According to the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, nearly 40% of high school students reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless, and rates of suicidal ideation among youth have surged alarmingly in recent years. The pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges, exposing systemic gaps in access to care that disproportionately affect low-income families and communities of color.

EveryMind's 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline call center has experienced a significant increase in calls from young people in crisis. These calls highlight the urgent need for expanded resources to meet the growing demand for mental health care tailored to children and youth.

This bill takes a bold and necessary step by creating a dedicated fund to support children's mental health services. By leveraging revenue from digital social media services, the State can ensure sustainable funding for:

- Expanding access to school-based mental health programs, which are critical lifelines for students.
- Increasing the availability of licensed clinicians and counselors to address workforce shortages.
- Supporting evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs that reduce the long-term costs of untreated mental health conditions.

At EveryMind, we know that when children and families can access mental health care early and consistently, outcomes improve dramatically. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue and for your commitment to Maryland's children and families.