

Testimony in Favor with Amendments to SB 284: Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act Bill (FY27)

Before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support with amendments for Senate Bill 284 – The Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act for Fiscal Year 2027. My name is Alyssa Sanders, and I serve as the Director of Advocacy at EveryMind, a nonprofit organization that has served Maryland’s communities for nearly 70 years by providing prevention, early intervention, and mental health services across the continuum of care.

Today, I am here to request amendments to the proposed funding cuts in the proposed State Budget that would make a \$20 million, or 20% cut, to school mental health care through the Consortium for Coordinated Community Supports under the Blueprint legislation.

At EveryMind, we witness the profound impact of school-based mental health services every day. We provide these services in over 40 schools in Maryland, delivering care that is accessible, timely, and responsive to the unique needs of children and families. 13 of these schools are served through grants provided by the Consortium – allowing us to provide therapy, mentoring, case management, and trainings to not only the students, but also their families, the school staff, and the surrounding communities to better support the whole child.

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. In fact, Maryland ranks 49th in the country for youth suicide. The pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges, exposing systemic gaps in access to care that disproportionately affect low-income families and communities of color.

Embedding mental health professionals in schools reduces barriers such as stigma, cost, and transportation, ensuring that students receive care before their struggles escalate. For example, a student who works with one of our Therapeutic Mentors at one of our Consortium-funded schools struggled with aggression and repeated suspensions due to trauma she was carrying at home. With consistent mentoring and finding someone she could trust, she has made it through this school year with no suspensions, improved grades, and has started talking about what she feels instead of acting out. The time invested in building trust and consistent support has helped open new pathways for this student, allowing her to get the support she needed to make better choices for herself and find positive ways to deal with her emotions. Multiply this story by thousands, and you will see the life changing working being done with Consortium funding.



Funding for the Consortium has been at risk since its establishment, despite the great results these investments in school mental health care have shown in the last several years. In FY25, Consortium-funded programs served more than 137,000 students in 86% of Maryland schools – with a nearly 90% satisfaction rate from students and their families. So far this school year, students have shown even higher rates of improvement than FY25 across all three levels of intervention - preventative, targeted, and intensive – highlighting the need for consistent services. Despite this, the BRFA has proposed cutting funding for the Consortium yet again, this time by \$20 million a year. Without a clear and sustainable funding plan, programs that serve our students will continue to be at risk of shutting down, losing trust within communities and causing more harm down the line for our students and their families.

As written, the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act 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.

We respectfully urge you to amend Senate Bill 284 and restore this critical funding so programs like ours, and students like those we serve, can continue to thrive. Thank you for your time and leadership on this issue.