

Testimony in Support of House Bill 197: The Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act
Before the House Ways and Means Committee

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 197, which seeks to expand critical funding for school-based mental health services. 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.

At EveryMind, we have witnessed firsthand the life-changing impact of school-based mental health services. Currently, we operate in over 40 schools across Maryland, 13 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) struggle 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.

House Bill 197 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 House Bill 197 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.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue, and I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 197.