

1/31/2022

**Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 293 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund

EveryMind, a nonprofit organization, strengthens communities and empowers individuals to reach optimal mental wellness. EveryMind has been positively impacting the mental health and wellness of children, youth, adults, veterans, and families in Maryland and across the National Capital Region for more than 60 years. Based in Rockville, EveryMind offers community education on a variety of topics, supports advocacy efforts at the local, state and federal levels, and implements a variety of programs and direct services. This includes operation of the 24/7 hotline in Montgomery County, staffed by qualified and trained staff and volunteers to provide supportive listening, information and resources, and crisis intervention (including suicide assessments) through phone, text, and chat services.

EveryMind is pleased to support HB 293 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services—9-8-8 Trust Fund. This bill designates 988 to be the phone number for Maryland’s suicide prevention and behavioral health crisis hotline and establishes a sustainable funding source to support existing behavioral health crisis call centers in Maryland.

Congress designated 988 as a new phone number to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In July 2022, 988 will go live. Beginning then, all phone companies will route 988 calls to local crisis call centers that are part of the Lifeline network. The local crisis call centers provide 24/7 free, confidential emotional support to people calling for help. It is expected that calls to the Lifeline will significantly increase when the new number goes live and Maryland needs to ensure that its existing eight local call centers are adequately resourced to support this influx of calls for help.

As a center accredited by the American Association of Suicidology and the International Council for Helplines that has been part of Lifeline since its inception in 2005 EveryMind’s hotline has been underfunded throughout Lifeline’s history in providing this lifesaving service. With the current national mental health crisis, the hotline is at capacity for responding to Lifeline calls, chats, and texts and will need financial support to continue to offer our highest quality of service to Marylanders during the expected surge. The service we provide is not only vital - it is money saving to our Counties, the state, and consumers. In addition, the training our Specialists receive in suicide prevention and safety planning exceeds that required by mental health graduate schools and licensure in the state of Maryland.

Maryland has the unique opportunity to align with national efforts to improve access to crisis care by designating 988 as the number for our state’s behavioral health crisis hotline and ensuring adequate funding to support local crisis call centers. **EveryMind urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB 293.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142