

Testimony for the Montgomery County Council
FY23 Operating Budget
April 20th, 2022

Good evening to Council President Alborno, Vice President Glass, and County Council members. I'd like to thank each of you for your support and demonstrated commitment to EveryMind's suicide prevention and mental health services in Montgomery County during the last, and many previous, fiscal years.

My name is Amse Heck and I am the Chief Development Officer at EveryMind. Usually, one of EveryMind's amazing volunteers comes to advocate for our services, but tonight, I wanted an opportunity to speak to you. I am here to represent EveryMind's request that this council approve the proposed funding in the County Executive's Budget for the Montgomery County Hotline's transition to 988 at full \$1M along with the request to continue funding the hotline's \$795K for expanded staffing and for the expansion of EveryMind's mental health services across many areas of DHHS such as \$700K for homeless diversion, \$42K for mental health first aid, and school-embedded mental health services. Last but far from least, I ask that you consider and adopt the proposed 10% inflationary increase across all nonprofit contracts this year. An additional 4% to County Executive's 6% proposed adjustment. This request would affect all our programs, staff, volunteers, and the residents of Montgomery County who we serve with our whole hearts. My parents were immigrants, moving to Montgomery County when I was barely born, for jobs at the NIH and in downtown DC. I grew up here, on the corner of Tildenwood Lane, when many of the neighborhoods we now work in were farms. My earliest and happiest memories were made here, and though we eventually moved away, it has been my great honor to return to serve the residents of this county. I came back to the area in 2015, when my husband, then serving in the United States Air Force, got orders to the Pentagon in his first assignment as a Colonel. A single-income family with a child and another on the way, I was ecstatic that we might be able to return to Rockville and give our children the happy memories that I grew up with. Unfortunately, on a Colonel's salary and with no student loan debt, we still could not afford to move here and provide the quality of life that we wanted for our children. This is the same hardship that our skilled case managers, licensed social workers, and therapists face every day, often carrying large student loans.

Montgomery County is losing a talented pool of specialized and licensed workers who are each necessary to provide vital services to our residents. Every industry is suffering from staffing shortages in what is dubbed the Great Resignation or Great Reshuffle, but this industry, health and humans services nonprofits, is one in which our staff are licensed to save lives. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that job openings and demand for therapists will increase 23% by the end of this decade. Social workers 12%. The same report indicates that salary for these professions has increased 20% in the last two years and is expected to continue to rise. However, there are not enough people in the pipeline to fill those openings for another decade and competition for this skilled, passionate, and dedicated labor force is fierce. Moreso for bi- or multi-lingual case



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managers, certified hotline specialists, peer navigators, and therapists. This past year, EveryMind has invested in our HR department, hiring a full-time recruiter to help us track down and compete to attract staff. In the past, we could backfill vacancies with Master of Social Work interns, but now interns rightly demand fair compensation for their time and skill, too. This past term EveryMind's HR department processed over 70 applications for interns. Only 2 accepted – 1/10th the previous Spring's intern cohort. In the Fall, we had 12 interns for FY22, compared to 35 in FY21. Most requested a salary or attended a community college where a paid internship is a requirement.

This 4% increase to the County Executive's proposed 6% is not about expanding services, but about fairly paying our frontline teams and the staff that support them so that we don't lose these talented professionals to other counties, for-profit employers, and other industries where they feel more valued. We won't get them back without spending significantly more taxpayer dollars. This 10% increase is ensuring that we keep licensed and certified professionals who know how to combat homelessness, depression, trauma, and suicide in our county, providing life-saving services to our residents. I urge you to find the \$4M additional dollars to the proposed increase to help not just EveryMind, but all nonprofits carrying out county contracts. We serve this county because we love it, so please help us make those serving to feel valued and respected.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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