

Testimony for the Montgomery County Council
FY25 Operating Budget
April 8th, 2024

Good afternoon, esteemed Councilmembers.

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. I'm grateful for the opportunity to represent EveryMind and advocate for the mental health interests of Montgomery County's residents. My name is Amse Heck, and I serve as the Chief Advancement Officer at EveryMind.

I want to introduce you to Marie, a 71-year-old caller to the Montgomery County Hotline. Marie reached out because she was experiencing constant stress and anxiety, but her therapist was unavailable, and she couldn't afford additional support. When Marie called, she was in distress, yelling for help. Our Crisis Hotline Counselor, Irfan, was there to assist her. Irfan patiently listened and helped her calm down. By the end of the call, Marie apologized for her outburst and expressed gratitude for the support she received when she needed it most. Marie's and Irfan's story is one of hundreds of visitors we serve on the Hotline every day.

Marie's story highlights two vital concerns that I wish to address today.

The County Executive's recommendation to decrease funding for the Montgomery County Hotline and the 988 lifeline to \$1.9 million for FY25, down from \$2.2 million in previous cycles, is deeply concerning. This reduction in funding is specifically to the Montgomery County Hotline and jeopardizes our ability to support residents like Marie, particularly our aging population who rely on the Hotline as one of the few life-saving available services supporting their mental health and combatting isolation. With a significant portion (17.2%) of Montgomery County's population over the age of 65, and projections indicating a 113% increase in older residents by 2040, maintaining current funding levels is imperative. In FY23, older adults represented 57% of all incoming calls to the Montgomery County Hotline. Cutting resources now would deprive the county residents of crucial support during their times of need.

Secondly, while we appreciate the proposed 3% increase in nonprofit contract funding, a more substantial increase is needed, especially in the health and human services sector. This additional funding would enable organizations like EveryMind to recruit and retain essential personnel, such as mental health therapists, care managers, and other frontline staffers. With nearly half of the US population residing in mental health shortage areas and Maryland reporting shortages in quality mental health care availability, competitive compensation is essential to attract and retain talented



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counselors doing lifesaving work, like Irfan. Moreover, Montgomery County's high cost of living exacerbates recruitment challenges, making it difficult to compete with other regions offering better incentives.

EveryMind urges the County Council to ensure that Montgomery County's nonprofits receive the necessary resources to provide the services and support that our residents desperately need. We implore you to allocate additional funding to address these pressing issues and continue providing exemplary service to our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Amse Heck

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