

Testimony of Alyssa Sanders, Director Advocacy, EveryMind  
Resolution to approve Supplemental Appropriation #25-16 to the FY25 Operating Budget,  
Montgomery County Government, Department of Health and Human Services, 988 Crisis  
Hotline Services, \$2,786,948

January 14, 2025

Thank you, Council President Stewart, Council Vice President Jawando, and the rest of the Council, for having us here today. My name is Alyssa Sanders, Advocacy Director at EveryMind which, as you all know, provides critical, life-saving work through the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for the residents of Montgomery County.

We are incredibly grateful for your support in ensuring we received the much-needed \$2.7 million for the Hotline in FY25. This funding is vital especially as the demand for 988 Lifeline support continues to grow.

These funds will support the hiring and retention of counselors, including those specifically focused on assisting callers with substance use disorders. This funding will also be used to complete a state-mandated security audit that will help to keep our services secure and confidential for those who rely on us in their most vulnerable moments.

A portion of the funds will also be directed toward wellness initiatives supporting the mental health of our team, who deal with high-stress situations daily. Strategies to combat burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress are a priority.

We see every day how essential these services are. For example, a young parent recently called the lifeline for the first time, overwhelmed by regular thoughts of suicide but determined to stay alive for their child. They feared reaching out might jeopardize their parenting rights but bravely shared their struggles—self-harm, past hospitalizations, and a lack of a safety plan.

The counselor provided a compassionate, non-judgmental space, assessing risk and exploring the visitor's feelings. Together, they built a safety plan, including strategies to cope and resources for affordable therapy. By the end of the call, the visitor expressed gratitude and agreed to follow up, finding hope and support in their darkest moment.

Recently, on November 6th, we experienced a 25% increase in call volume to the hotline, driven by both local and global uncertainties. On that same day, the number of people reaching out to 988 via chat and text was the highest the state has ever recorded.

Your support has allowed us to keep the program stable and continue providing these essential services to the community, and for that, we are profoundly grateful. Thank you.