



**Testimony for the Montgomery County Council
FY21 Operating Budget
April 17, 2020**

My name is Liz Rubenstein and I am a volunteer on the Montgomery County 24/7 phone, text and chat Hotline operated by EveryMind.

Each week, I have the honor of spending a few hours talking with the most vulnerable members of our community who desperately need to connect with someone, to feel heard, to share their most painful wounds and relieve their sense of emptiness because if they don't, they may not survive the night. I will never meet these people I talk with. I will never learn how their story ends. But in the time we spend together, I help them see their value and worth and I believe that has the power to transform and save lives.

I helped a college student experiencing the loss of a first love literally step back from the ledge she wanted to fall from to end her unbearable pain.

I spoke with a young man who said, "I told myself if someone answered this line I would not jump from the bridge I'm standing on." I answered that line and he did not jump from that bridge.

I spoke with another caller who had decided to end his life on his birthday in two days. He was convinced that 23 years was long enough to live a life that brought no happiness, no purpose and no love. Repeated disappointments, rejection from his family and constant feelings of being unwanted left him convinced that the world was an ugly place in which he did not belong. We talked for over an hour and discussed the things that did bring joy to his life and that made it worth living. When our call ended, he had decided not to end his life.

Not all of the calls I take on the Hotline are this intense. But every call is important to the health and wellness of our community. EveryMind's call specialists are sometimes the only other people our callers connect with that day.

An elderly caller who lives with bipolar disorder has made calling the Hotline each night before he goes to bed a part of his regular routine. He talks to the call specialist about what made him grateful for life that day. Sometimes, the only thing he feels gratitude for is the Hotline and the call specialist who answered the phone.

Then there's a young immigrant who lives with a developmental disorder and has no one else to talk to about a woman he believes is his girlfriend, a famous singer who is always



traveling the country on tour. He shares his loneliness and sadness with our call specialists and we listen without judgment.

Of the almost 18,000 calls, texts and chats we answered in 2019, these are just a few of the lives we impacted. We take pride in the fact that, of the 4,200 suicide screenings conducted last year, only 6% required additional intervention from higher cost services like 9-1-1 or a hospital emergency department.

Mental health impacts everyone. Any one of us can experience a mental health crisis and this is why knowing the signs and symptoms and where to turn for help before a crisis happens is so critical. In 2019, we provided 54 workshops and seminars on mental health and wellness topics, educating 2,940 participants about mental health challenges and providing information on how to access essential resources. We also promoted BTheOne, a campaign that teaches youth and families how to help someone who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, developed in partnership with Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services and Montgomery County Public Schools.

The Hotline is on the frontline every day answering calls, texts and chats and providing education to our community in schools, in houses of worship, in workplaces and even in the offices of our County Councilmembers. EveryMind seeks to prevent mental health crises through education and supportive listening but when that may not be enough, we're also there to provide mental health crisis intervention and save lives.

Therefore, EveryMind respectfully requests that the County Council provide an additional \$29,325 to fully fund our FY21 Crisis Prevention and Intervention Education County grant request.

But this is only a small fraction of what we ask the County Council to consider. The total cost to operate the phone, text and chat services is approximately \$1.3 million a year. Even with current funding from the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County Public Schools, private foundation grants, fundraising efforts, and leveraging the use of volunteers to help provide coverage, the funding gap is still over \$830,000 annually. In addition, we miss nearly 1,000 calls per month. It is essential that we work together to close the funding gap on this vital community resource so we can be there to answer EVERY call.

We know that sometime in the next 18 months, a new national emergency number – 9-8-8 – will be implemented to manage behavioral health crises. We fully support a phone number that is easy to remember for community members to access support during a mental health crisis. However, this will have a tremendous impact on the number of calls to our hotline,



which needs significant resources to meet the current demand. We have already seen a 23% increase in call volume as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic and anticipate this number will continue to rise as the long-term consequences of this crisis become apparent in our community. Financial insecurity, job losses, and the potential for a significant economic downturn will prompt a second crisis related to the mental health and wellness of our community. EveryMind has already taken steps to meet the current challenges including investing in technology that allows our call specialists to answer calls, texts and chats remotely. And we've increased the number of staff and volunteers providing coverage on each shift.

The Hotline has been historically underfunded but EveryMind has risen to meet the challenges presented by the current crisis in our community. We stand ready to meet those that will arise in the future. We ask that you stand with us in support of providing additional funding to close the gap and ensure the long-term stability and sustainability of this critical community resource.

Finally, as a member of Nonprofit Montgomery, EveryMind fully supports the following FY21 budget requests to support nonprofit organizations:

1. Maintain the Community Grants and programs moved to base budget contracts that are recommended in the County Executive's FY 21 Operating Budget. These recommendations were part of a thoughtful process that should not be disrupted at this point.
2. Maintain the recommended 1.5% increase for nonprofit contracts with the Department of Health and Human Services that is recommended in the County Executive's budget.
3. Add an additional 2.5% increase to nonprofit contracts in DHHS for a total increase of 4%.
4. Provide a 4% increase for nonprofit base budget contracts in all other County Departments (including Recreation, DHCA, etc.). Contracts in other departments have not typically received increases to recognize increase costs of doing business.

Thank you for your time and attention.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

February 10, 2020

County Executive Marc Elrich
Executive Office Building
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear County Executive Elrich,

Last year, at our request, the Council added funding in the budget for EveryMind's text and chat line in order to extend hours from 9:00PM – 12:00AM every day. This was an important initial investment for our youth at a time of day when they are likely to be most isolated and vulnerable. We know that mental health crisis services are needed around the clock and whether it is a call or a text, we cannot afford to miss these cries for help.

As you know, one in five children experiences a mental health condition and only 20 percent of them receive professional help. Nearly 50 percent of students over 14 with a mental health condition will drop out of school. We have a responsibility to support our youngest resident's mental health needs and the earlier we can identify issues and intervene, the better the outcomes.

We know that you share our commitment to address the mental health crisis in our County. Today, we are requesting that you include \$73,000 in your operating budget submission to expand the hours of EveryMind's text and chat line to include 8:00AM – 12:00PM every day, which would reduce missed texts by 50 percent; and that you add \$230,000 for EveryMind's call line so that they can dramatically reduce their missed call rate and get to functional zero. Based on data on their missed texts, chats, and calls, this funding would be critical to meeting the existing needs of residents in the County today.

Call Data

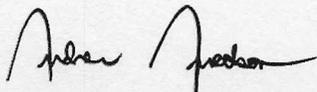
- During FY19 15,162 calls were answered and 11,043 calls went unanswered due to limited staff capacity
- This trend of missed calls has been consistent for several years and they are seeing a similar trend during the first half of FY20
- Their call volume has not decreased over the years as they have expanded text and chat services, and they know approximately 80% of calls are diverting individuals from crises
- Approximately 10% of calls are from youth ages 24 and under

Text and Chat Data

- Expanding text/chat hours of operation during FY20 has reduced missed texts by 50%
- Based on YTD FY20 data, they project to double the number of texts/chats answered compared to FY19
- 60% of text/chat conversations are with youth ages 24 and under
- 83% of the text/chat conversations require suicide assessments

We thank you for your consideration of this important request and look forward to working together to address this critical community need.

Sincerely,



Andrew Friedson



Will Jawando

CC: Andrew Kleine, Chief Administrative Officer
Richard Madaleno, Director, Office of Management and Budget
Raymond Crowel, Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Councilmember Gabe Albornoz, Chair, Committee on Health and Human Services



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EveryMind’s hotline provides supportive listening, information and resources, suicide screenings and crisis intervention via phone, text and online chat to the Montgomery County community.

Status of Current Operations

The hotline is currently staffed primarily with volunteers who answer phone, text and chats from the community. Hotline specialists are available by phone 24/7, while text and chat services are available from 12 p.m. to 12 a.m. 7 days per week.

In FY19:

- 15,162 phone calls were answered
- 11,043 calls went unanswered due to our limited staff/volunteer capacity
- 2,643 chats and texts were answered
- 4,200 suicide screenings were conducted across all platforms

In the 1st quarter of FY20 (after expanding text/chat capacity to 12 hours from 9 hours per day), 561 suicide screenings were conducted. Fewer than 5% required additional intervention from 911 or the Crisis Center.

Our accreditation body (the American Association of Suicideology) requires an intensive level of quality assurance from our hotline managers in order to maintain our standing. This oversight includes review by two supervisors for each phone call, text and chat.

Funding Gaps

We calculate that the following would be required to run a fully-staffed hotline (paid staff on phone, text, chat 24/7).

- 3 paid hotline specialists per hour for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, supplemented with volunteers.
- 4 full time supervisors to address the quality assurance, data analysis and scheduling demands and expectations of our accreditation body.

This staffing structure requires 26,280 hours of coverage each year. At a current rate of \$50 per hour, the total cost to operate the phone, text and chat services is approximately \$1,314,000 per year.

Total Cost	\$1,314,000
Designated Funding	
Department of Health and Human Services	435,747
Other Sources (MCPS, designated grants, etc)	46,000
Total Funding FY20	481,747
Gap in Funding	(\$832,253)
Anticipated Undesignated Funding FY20	\$120,000
Leveraged with volunteers	\$150,000

Anticipated Challenges Moving Forward

EveryMind anticipates that in the next two to three years a three digit number similar to 911 will be implemented across the country to handle behavioral health crises. This will have a tremendous impact on the volume of calls we receive. EveryMind needs to ensure that we can adequately meet not only the challenges we currently face, but those that we anticipate on the horizon.

