

**M E M O R A N D U M**

July 21, 2020

TO: Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee

FROM: Vivian Yao, Legislative Analyst

SUBJECT: Special Appropriation to the County Government's FY21 Operating Budget, Department of Health and Human Services, Behavioral Health and Crisis Prevention, Crisis Prevention & Intervention Services - \$395,000 for Montgomery County Hotline (Source of Funds: Federal Grant and General Fund Reserves) and Amendment to FY21 Operating Budget Resolution 19-472 Section G, FY21 Designation of Entities for Non-Competitive Contract Award Status: EveryMind

PURPOSE: Review and make recommendation on the proposed special appropriation

***Those expected to participate in the worksession include:***

- Ann Mazur, CEO, EveryMind
- Raymond Crowel, Director, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
- Lindsay Lucas, Office of Management and Budget

The proposed special appropriation of \$395,000 to support enhanced services of the EveryMind Hotline was introduced on July 21 and is scheduled for public hearing and action on June 28. The proposed special appropriation is attached at ©1-3.

**Background**

The COVID-19 public health crisis, restrictions intended to slow the spread of disease, and social unrest in response to incidents of systemic racism and violence have placed stress on individuals and families in the county. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, many residents have been challenged with unemployment or significantly reduced work and income and difficulty meeting basic needs, such as food and housing.

Having families in close quarters has exacerbated family tensions and feelings of alienation and isolation. After the COVID-19 restrictions went into effect, the County experienced an increase in not only the number of domestic violence cases but also their severity. The recent suicide deaths of three Montgomery County youth underscore the

tremendous difficulties that youth are facing under these challenging circumstances.

EveryMind's Montgomery County Hotline, accredited by the National Suicide Prevention Line, provides supportive listening, information and resource referrals, and crisis intervention (including suicide assessments) through telephone, text, and chat services. It has been supporting County residents expressing increased stress and anxiety as well as significant loneliness and isolation. Hotline participants include older adults living in facilities that are unable to have visitors, and youth who are stuck at home in abusive situations or feeling alienated from family and friends.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, EveryMind has experienced a 25% increase in call volume, which has remained steady through June. In response to this increased call volume, EveryMind increased technology and phone equipment to transition operations to remote work, following CDC and Montgomery County public health and safety requirements and guidelines. From mid-March through June, EveryMind was able to provide double staffing during most daytime shifts for calls, texts and chats due to a one-time funding increase from Montgomery County Public Schools for FY20. As a result of this double staffing, EveryMind saw the hotline call answer rate increase to 83% from around 60% pre-COVID-19. The hotline also saw a 58% decrease in missed calls.

Youth primarily access the text/chat services offered by the hotline; however, text services are limited to the hours of noon to midnight and 33% of missed texts are received between the hours 8:00 am and noon.

## **Proposal**

The special appropriation would support (1) the higher level of service that EveryMind's Montgomery County Hotline has provided since the COVID-19 public health emergency began through December 2020 and (2) the expansion of text services from 8 am to noon through FY21.

The proposed resolution appropriates \$300,000 in federal grant funding to add 8 full-time equivalents of specialists to staff the hotline, along with supervisory, managerial, and administrative support for these positions. The additional positions are needed to address the increased calls due to the COVID-19 emergency and maintain the number of hotline shifts per week, and double staffing coverage provided in FY20 in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

The proposed resolution also appropriates \$95,000 in County General Fund Reserves to expand hotline text services from 8 am to noon through FY21.

## **Crisis Prevention Efforts in the County**

The Montgomery County Hotline administered by EveryMind is one of two 24/7 crisis call centers in the County; the other one is operated by the DHHS Crisis Center. The EveryMind hotline is part of the County's crisis prevention system and has been included in planning discussions around developing a comprehensive crisis response system for the County. The Committee, meeting jointly with the Public Safety Committee on July 9 to review the special

appropriation for Mobile Crisis Response, heard from the Primary Care Coalition about its efforts in working with Nexus Montgomery, County departments and private providers including EveryMind, to submit a grant application to the Maryland Health Services Cost Review Commission to implement the Crisis Now model of comprehensive crisis response. If Nexus Montgomery receives an award to implement a Crisis Now framework, a portion of the award may be directed to the EveryMind Hotline; and how call center services will function (with a goal of reducing calls to 911 or visits to an emergency department) will need to be reviewed.

**Council staff comments and recommendation:**

**Council staff recommends approval of the special appropriation to address increased Montgomery County Hotline call volume during the COVID-19 public health emergency and meet the demand for additional text services.** Supporting increased hotline staffing through the end of the year will allow the use of Federal Care Act funding and give the Committee the opportunity to come back in the fall to review the long term demand for hotline services, understand whether additional non-County resources will be available to support the hotline, and discuss how call center services will move forward if Nexus Montgomery is awarded the Crisis Now grant.

Resolution No.: \_\_\_\_\_  
Introduced: \_\_\_\_\_  
Adopted: \_\_\_\_\_

**COUNTY COUNCIL  
FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND**

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Lead Sponsor: County Council

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**SUBJECT:** Special Appropriation to the Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget  
Montgomery County Government  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Behavioral Health and Crisis Prevention  
Crisis Prevention & Intervention Services-Montgomery County Hotline  
\$395,000 (Source of Funds: Federal Grant and General Fund Reserves) and  
Amendment to Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget Resolution 19-472  
Section G, FY21 Designation of Entities for Non-Competitive  
Contract Award Status: EveryMind

**Background**

1. Section 308 of the County Charter provides that a special appropriation is an appropriation which states that it is necessary to meet an unforeseen disaster or other emergency, or to act without delay in the public interest. Each special appropriation shall be approved by not less than six Councilmembers. The Council may approve a special appropriation at any time after public notice by news release. Each special appropriation shall specify the source of funds to finance it.
2. On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization declared coronavirus COVID-19 a pandemic, and it has spread rapidly throughout the world. As of July 14, 2020, there were 15,883 confirmed cases in Montgomery County. There were 724 confirmed deaths and 38 probable deaths in Montgomery County. To slow the spread of the disease, Maryland Governor Hogan declared a State of Emergency on March 5, 2020 and issued Executive Orders that closed schools, closed non-essential business, and required Maryland residents to shelter at home. Restrictions intended to slow the spread of disease have placed stress on individuals and families.
3. Because of these restrictions, many county residents have been challenged with unemployment or significantly reduced work and income and difficulty meeting basic needs, such as food and housing. Since the beginning of March, Montgomery County residents have filed over 87,000 initial unemployment claims.

4. Having families in close quarters has exacerbated family tensions and feelings of alienation and isolation. Since the COVID-19 restrictions went into effect, the County has experienced an increase not only in the number of domestic violence cases but also in their severity. The recent suicide deaths of three Montgomery County youth underscore the tremendous difficulties that youth are facing under these challenging circumstances.
5. Mental health supports are in great demand by County residents struggling with COVID-19 related challenges. EveryMind's Montgomery County hotline, which provides supportive listening, information and resource referrals, and crisis intervention (including suicide assessments) through telephone, text, and chat services, has supported County residents expressing increased stress and anxiety due to the virus as well as significant loneliness and isolation as a result of the need to quarantine and social distance. Hotline participants include older adults living in facilities that are unable to have visitors, and youth who are stuck at home in abusive situations or feeling alienated from family and friends. Youth primarily access the text/chat services offered by the hotline; however, text services are limited to the hours of noon to midnight and 33% of missed texts are received between the hours 8:00 am and noon.
6. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, EveryMind has experienced a 25% increase in call volume, which has remained steady through June. In response to the increase in call volume, EveryMind increased technology and phone equipment to transition operations to remote work, following CDC and Montgomery County public health and safety requirements and guidelines. From mid-March through June, Every Mind was able to provide double staffing during most daytime shifts for calls, texts and chats due to a one-time funding increase from Montgomery County Public Schools for FY20. As a result of this double staffing, EveryMind saw the hotline call answer rate increase to 83% from around 60% pre-COVID-19. The hotline also saw a 58% decrease in missed calls.
7. Funding to support a higher level of service from EveryMind's Montgomery County Hotline is needed for individuals in crisis. This special appropriation will support the addition of 8 full-time equivalents of specialists to staff the Hotline, along with supervisory, managerial, and administrative support for these positions, through December 2020. The additional positions are needed to address the increased calls due to the COVID-19 emergency and maintain the number of hotline shifts per week and double staffing coverage provided in FY20 in response to the COVID-19 emergency. In addition, the funding will also support the expansion of text services from 8 am to noon through FY21.
8. Notice of public hearing was given and a public hearing was held.

### Action

A special appropriation to the FY21 Operating Budget of the Montgomery County Government, Department of Health and Human Services, Behavioral Health and Crisis Services, in the amount of \$395,000 is approved as follows:

<u>Personnel Expense</u>	<u>Operating Expense</u>	<u>Capital Outlay</u>	<u>Source TOTALof Funds</u>
\$0	\$300,000 \$ 95,000	\$0	Federal Grant General Fund Reserves

The funding appropriated in this resolution must be added to a noncompetitive agreement with EveryMind and only used to deliver the expanded Montgomery County hotline services described in paragraph 7.

This resolution amends Resolution 19-472, Section G, FY21 Designation of Entities for Non-Competitive Award Status to add funding to the contract with EveryMind with the purpose to “provide confidential, supportive mental health hotline for County residents and a youth suicide prevention hotline” in the amount of \$395,000.

This appropriation is needed to address a public health emergency and to act without delay in the public interest.

This is a correct copy of Council action.

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Selena Mendy Singleton, Esq.  
Clerk of the Council