



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

November 21, 2023

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #24-9
988 Crisis Hotline Services.

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice finds that Supplemental Appropriation #24-9 988 Crisis Hotline Services is likely to continue creating a universal mental health care benefit in the County, as it allows for the maintenance of Lifeline/988 services. However, this supplemental appropriation is not likely to reduce racial disparities or inequities in mental health outcomes as it is not designed nor targets resources in ways that account for racially disparate trends in suicide rates or mental health risk factors and treatment access.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #24-9 is to allocate \$960,000 from the State Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) to help cover operational and administrative costs related to providing Lifeline/988 hotline services. This supplemental appropriation allows for the continuation of EveryMind, Inc.'s work as the county's 988 hotline provider.

In July 2022, the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) conducted a racial equity impact assessment (REIA) of supplemental appropriation #23-02,¹ which pertained to the county's transition to 988 and utilization of EveryMind, Inc. as the hotline provider. In the REIA, ORESJ cited research showing how suicide rates differ by race, ethnicity,

¹ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-02.pdf>

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and other demographic characteristics (nationally and in the County). ORESJ also explained how reducing racial and other disparities in mental health outcomes requires keen attention to the ways systemic racism affects suicide risk factors as well as access to support services. In January 2023, ORESJ conducted a REIA on Supplemental Appropriation #23-59² to continue the 988 transition; Supplemental Appropriation #24-9 maintains this work. There are no significant changes in service offerings or scope compared to previous REIAs on the same subject.

ORESJ recommends that those considering Supplemental Appropriation #24-9 do so by reviewing previous REIAs pertaining to 988 (mentioned above) as well as the following REIAs focused on the intersection of mental health, suicide prevention, and race:

- REIA of Supplemental Appropriation #22-36 SAMHSA Community Block Grant: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-36.pdf>
- REIA of Supplemental Appropriation #22-43 Crisis 2 Connection: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-43.pdf>

In addition to these analyses, ORESJ would like to draw attention to a trend we observed in our most recent research on this supplemental appropriation. Across several sources, increases in Black suicide (and ideation) and self-harm, particularly among youth, are highlighted as an area of emergent concern. And though not central to the allocation of this supplemental appropriation, we felt this trend was worth highlighting for future inquiry at the County level.

According to the results of screening tools used by Mental Health America, the largest increase in the proportion of people experiencing suicidal ideation between 2019 and 2020 was for Native American Indian and Black or African American screeners³. More recently, in March 2022, the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry released a policy statement⁴ highlighting just how severe the increase in Black youth suicide rates has become. While suicide rates have risen to the second leading cause of death for all youth between 10-19, the rates among Black youth have risen faster than any other racial/ethnic group⁵. The increase has led to Black youth being twice as likely as

² <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-59.pdf>

³ <https://mhanational.org/mental-health-data-2020>

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https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Policy_Statements/2022/AACAP_Policy_Statement_Increased_Suicide_Among_Black_Youth_US.aspx

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https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Policy_Statements/2022/AACAP_Policy_Statement_Increased_Suicide_Among_Black_Youth_US.aspx and <https://health.maryland.gov/bha/suicideprevention/Documents/Session%201A%20-%20BLACK%20BOYS,%20BLACK%20MEN,%20AND%20SUICIDE.pdf>

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their White counterparts to die by suicide⁶. Rates vary by gender as well, with some studies reporting that the largest annual percentage change in suicide rate is among Black girls, while still 2.5 times as many Black boys die by suicide as Black girls⁷. Among high school youth in 2021, rates of students who attempted suicide were highest among American Indian/Alaskan Native (16%) followed by Black youth (14%); both groups had rates higher than that of the overall high school population (10%)⁸. In response to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's most recent suicide death data released in February 2023, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention reflected on the increases in suicide rates among Native American, Black, and Hispanic people, stating: "We see how structural racism and social and health inequities – among other factors – may be negatively impacting the mental health and suicide risk of historically marginalized communities"⁹. As the county continues to fund Lifeline/988 services and other mental health services, keeping in mind the impacts of structural racism can help in the design and distribution of resources, most likely to shrink gaps and reverse overall trends in suicide rates.

cc: Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive
Dr. James Bridgers, Director, Department of Health and Human Services

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https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Policy_Statements/2022/AACAP_Policy_Statement_Increased_Suicide_Among_Black_Youth_US.aspx

⁷ [https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567\(21\)01365-4/fulltext](https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567(21)01365-4/fulltext) and

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/suicide-rates-rise-in-a-generation-of-black-youth/>

⁸ <https://sprc.org/about-suicide/scope-of-the-problem/racial-and-ethnic-disparities/>

⁹ <https://afsp.org/story/2021-cdc-suicide-death-data-intensifies-the-call-for-continued-suicide-prevention>