



3/12/2023

Relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund and the imposition of a 988 access fee.

Dear Chairman Representative Headland and Members of the Finance and Taxation Committee:

My name is Josh Sayler and I have been working in behavioral health for over 16 years, the last 5 ½ years with Prairie St. John's, a crisis behavioral health hospital. I humbly ask for your support of SB 2149. As one of the over 200+ crisis centers in the 988 Lifeline network, FirstLink provides free and confidential support available 24/7/365, connecting those experiencing mental health, substance use, or suicidal crises with trained crisis counselors. Local crisis centers are a vital component of the crisis care continuum that offers life-saving interventions and referrals to local resources to help individuals thrive in the community. 988 is a main entry point for callers in emotional distress to access services, as it represents the first point of contact individuals will have within the crisis continuum.

At Prairie St. John's we have seen the need for behavioral health services continue to trend up at an alarming rate over the last several years, and our partnership with FirstLink has been integral in providing the assistance required for those in crisis. In 2018 Prairie St. John's took 3,725 calls prompted by an individual with suicidal ideation or had attempted suicide. This number stayed consistent until 2021, when it increased 42% to 5,318. We had 5,286 of these call in 2022. FirstLink has seen an increase of 930% for calls relating to suicidal ideation over the past decade.

Everyone knows to dial 911 for a medical emergency. 911 is funded with a telecommunications user fee, this should be no different for 988.

FirstLink requires updated technology and equipment to meet increased demand and this bill would make that possible.

Thank you again for your commitment to serving individuals experiencing a mental health emergency. Please feel free to contact me at my information below if you have any questions or to discuss ensuring individuals in our great state of North Dakota have access to robust and well-resourced crisis intervention services.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Josh Sayler
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