

March 12, 2023

Dear Financial and Taxation Committee,

I am reaching out to encourage support for SB 2149.

Working as chair of the Department of Psychology at NDSU I understand the need for a 24/7/365 988 suicide and crisis phone line. Behavioral health issues can arise at any time, and it is important to have a well-established, well-staffed, and well-maintained system for vulnerable people to reach out for assistance.

Everyone knows to dial 911 for a medical emergency, it is slowly becoming known throughout North Dakota to dial 988 for behavioral health emergencies. 911 is funded with a telecommunications user fee, I believe this should be no different for 988.

In previous testimony, FirstLink outlined that ten years ago they took 1,501 calls directly related to suicide, in 2021 they took 15,465 calls related to suicide, this number went up to 19,000 in 2022. The complexity and volume of their calls have greatly increased. They need to have a diverse and culturally competent workforce and pay their staff professional wages to provide quality service to those reaching out for help. They need updated technology and equipment to make sure that they are ready, willing, and able to answer the 988 and 211 phone lines 24/7/365. SB 2149 would make this all possible.

Again, I want to thank you for your support for this bill, and for your support for the people of our community.

Sincerely,
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