



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Written Testimony in Support of SB 2149
House Finance and Taxation Committee
March 11th, 2023

The **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) North Dakota Chapter** writes in support of Senate Bill 2149, which would provide imposition and continued appropriation of a 988 access fee. AFSP is the leading national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide; our local North Dakota Chapter carries out this mission across the state through research, education, advocacy, and support.

In the most recent information provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- North Dakota lost 135 residents to suicide.
- Suicide is the **2nd leading cause of death** for three major age groups: youth ages 10-24, young adults 25-34, and adults 35-44.
- Over 3 times as many people died by suicide than in alcohol related accidents.

On October 17, 2020, President Trump signed the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act (S.2661) into law, designating "988" as "the universal telephone number for reaching a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system operating through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline." The **Designation Act** included language allowing each state to pass their own legislation funding 988 and local in-state crisis call centers the same way as 911, through state-managed monthly customer service fees.

State support for and investment in call centers within the Lifeline network is critical. While Lifeline is a national program, federal funding is minimal for each center and largely goes toward managing call routing, best practice standards, public messaging, and technical assistance. Local crisis centers like North Dakota's FirstLink rely on funding from state and local contributors to operate and grow.

The transition to 988 was anticipated to see a significant increase in crisis center call, chat, and text volume. FirstLink has already reported growth in the number of calls and texts received since implementation of the hotline in July 2022. Reliable, sustainable funding will be needed from multiple sources, including state and local contributors, for North Dakota's crisis service systems to continue meeting community crisis needs.

Members of the Committee, with your support, passage of this legislation will affirm the state's commitment to improving the lives of North Dakota residents and their loved ones and to preventing the tragic loss of life to suicide in the future. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 2149. The AFSP North Dakota Chapter is grateful for your consideration of this critical bill and strongly urges your support.

With hope and gratitude,

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