

SB 2149 Testimony
House Finance and Taxation Committee
Representative Headland, Chairman
March 13, 2023

Chairman Headland and Members of the Committee, I am Carlotta McCleary, the Executive Director of the ND Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (NDFFCMH), which is a parent run organization that focuses on the needs of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs and their families. I am also the Executive Director for Mental Health America of ND (MHAND) which is a consumer-run organization whose mission is to promote mental health through education, advocacy, understanding, and access to quality care for all individuals. Today I am testifying as the Chairman of the Behavioral Health Planning Council (BHPC). Members of the BHPC are appointed by the Governor. BHPC's objective is to monitor, review, and evaluate the allocation and adequacy of mental health and substance abuse services in North Dakota. The BHPC has a focus and vision on wellness and recovery that is consumer and family driven. Part of the BHPC's work has been to oversee the implementation of the Human Services Research Institute's (HSRI) report Implementation Plan. We work with HSRI and the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services to provide advice on the implementation process.

Today the BHPC is here to testify in support of SB 2149, the creation and funding of the 988 crisis hotline program. The best practice model for a behavioral health crisis response system is to: have someone to call (988), someone to respond (mobile crisis teams), and a place to go (crisis stabilization units for adults, mental health crisis beds for children).

You must have all three legs of this stool for the system to work. Today we are specifically talking about someone to call.

In 2018, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a report that found that from 1999 to 2016, North Dakota had the highest growth in suicide rates in the country (at 57.6%). Since the Global War on Terrorism began, more North Dakota National Guard Members died by suicide than by combat. North Dakota suicide rates remain among the highest in the nation, with us having lost 153 people in 2021—10% of whom were in the armed forces. In North Dakota suicide is the second leading cause of death in ages 10 to 24. Over 36% of North Dakota high school students report that they are living with someone who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal at some point in their life. Through the North Dakota Youth Risk Behavior Survey, North Dakota has continued to see a rise in children and youth seriously considering attempting suicide (18.6%) and making a plan to attempt suicide (14.8%). FirstLink has also provided data regarding their call logs. At around 2013, FirstLink reported that it received 1,501 calls directly related to suicide. In 2021 they received 15,465 calls related to suicide. More people are becoming aware of hotlines to seek help, but more people are also finding themselves in crisis.

988 was officially designated as the new behavioral health crisis hotline with the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act. 988 is an easy-to-remember number that is operational 24/7 for anyone experiencing suicidal ideation, a mental health crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress. In 2021, North Dakota Department of Human Services received planning grant funding from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). FirstLink was also recently notified that there will be a one-

time grant that would be completed in 2024 that can help enhance 988 infrastructure. SAMHSA explicitly states that it has created these grants on the basis that state governments would consistently fund these efforts in the future. Without securing adequate additional state funding, North Dakota could experience a significant downside in its ability to adequately respond to behavioral health crises, including suicide. 988 is a critical component to North Dakota's crisis response system. SB 2149 will have great results in providing consistent funding for North Dakota's 988 system.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

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