

**SB 2149 TESTIMONY**  
**Senate Appropriation Committee**  
**Senator Kathy Hogan**  
**February 15, 2023**

Chairman Bekkedahl and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kathy Hogan, and I represent District 21.

In 2020, Congress designated the new 988 dialing code to be operated through the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. 988 is seen as a first step towards a transformed crisis care system in America. With this new federal designation and standards, came many new requirements and regrettably no funding. Throughout the nation many states are now considering implementation of phone fees to fund this program like the funding of 911 systems. This bill was modeled after the Colorado legislation.

Every community, urban and rural and almost every structure of our society is feeling the behavioral health crisis. Schools, businesses, health care, churches and law enforcement are all begging for help. Over the last 7 years we have added significant resources with substance use vouchers, the new mental health provider registry that was just rolled out in the last six months and expansion of

crisis response teams in some parts of the state. But, the response system is not able to keep up with demand. People with serious needs are still waiting 6 to 9 months for an appointment. Our jails are filled with individuals with diagnosed behavioral health problems.

During the policy process, we worked closely with the Tax Department regarding the language and collection process for phone fees. They requested a \$50,000 funding to set up the collection process and feel that they are able to handle this collection process without additional funding.

We also met with the ND Department of Human Services regarding the list of available federal funding options listed in the letter from the wireless telecommunication representative and learned that all those resources are currently designated. We did include the amendment recommended liability language they requested.

Philosophically I oppose fees, but I recognize that without a funding source this essential infrastructure would probably not be considered for general fund dollars.

First Link is the private agency currently providing the 988 services. They did receive a start grant of about \$450,000 to purchase some needed additional services but the core funding to answer the calls, maintain all of the local resources to respond and to pay a living wage is not there. This bill will strengthen a critical piece of crisis response network.

