

1/13/2022

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 Senator Lee and Members of the Human Services Committee.

On behalf of FirstLink, I would like to thank you for your continued unwavering support and commitment to serving people in crisis, including individuals in our state who will contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988 Lifeline). My name is Ashley Lemke and I am the Helpline Director here at FirstLink. I am asking for your support of SB 2149.

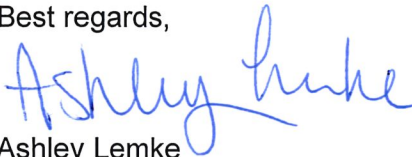
It is important to me that this be created as suicide prevention is something that hits home for me. Having family members who have attempted suicide, I am grateful that FirstLink is there to support those who are in such a devastating state. This fund would do so much for our callers and our state as a whole. 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 and FirstLink is the only designated center to answer the 988 and 211 phone lines in North Dakota.

Not only is this fund important to me because I've been affected by suicide in my personal life, but working at FirstLink, I also see the value in my professional life. The complexity and volume of the calls we take have greatly increased. We need to have a diverse and culturally competent workforce and to be able to pay our staff professional wages to provide quality service to those reaching out for help. We need updated technology and equipment to make sure that we are ready, willing, and able to answer the 988 and 211 phone lines 24/7/365. This bill would make this all possible.

Thank you again for your commitment to serving individuals experiencing a mental health emergency. Please feel free to contact me at the email address or phone number 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,



Ashley Lemke  
Helpline Director  
FirstLink  
701-293-6462 ext. 106  
ashleyle@myfirstlink.org