

Submitted by Thomas M. Tweten on 1/13/2022

Re: 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). I have served on the FirstLink board of directors since 2017. I humbly ask for your support of SB 2149.

As one of the over 200+ crisis centers in the 988 Lifeline network, FirstLink provides free and confidential support available 24/7/365, connecting those experiencing mental health, substance use, or suicidal crises with trained crisis counselors. 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. 988 is a main entry point for callers in emotional distress to access services, as it represents the first point of contact individuals will have within the crisis continuum. Ten years ago, FirstLink took 1,501 calls directly related to suicide, in 2022 they took 15,465 calls related to suicide. The complexity and volume of calls have greatly increased. FirstLink needs a diverse and culturally competent workforce and 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 and able to answer the 988 and 211 phone lines 24/7/365. This bill would make this all possible.

Outside of my roll on the board at FirstLink, it is easy to see the need for mental health services in our state has continued to increase. I frequently see and hear about people who are struggling and suicide is taking a heavy toll on our communities. I believe the members of the committee are seeing the same and are in a position to take action. Although crisis centers are not the only piece of the puzzle surrounding mental health and suicide, I believe they are a vital component.

Thank you again for your commitment to serving individuals experiencing a mental health emergency. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or to discuss ensuring individuals in North Dakota have access to robust and well-resourced crisis intervention services.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Thomas M. Tweten  
[thomastweten@hotmail.com](mailto:thomastweten@hotmail.com)  
[ttweten@bell.insurance](mailto:ttweten@bell.insurance)  
701-361-6610