

TESTIMONY
Senate Human Services Committee
SB 2149
January 17, 2023
Senator Kathy Hogan

Chairman Lee and members of the Senate Human Service Committee, my name is Kathy Hogan, and I represent District 21 central Fargo and a corner of West Fargo.

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 regretfully 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. Section 1 describes the purpose and basic structure of the system including establishment of a crisis stabilization fund and implementation of the response structure primarily assigned to the ND Department of Health and Human Services. Section 2 includes necessary definitions and outlines the basic structure of collection of fees. Section 3 defines the effective date to be December 31, 2023. This is necessary to assure that the infrastructure is in place.

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.

This vision is to start at the very beginning. If a person needs help, who should they call. 988 is a good beginning but it needs to be strengthened both internally with more qualified staff that can be retained, and externally how do they manage handoff of a caller to a system that can respond. to all communities throughout ND. How do we get a person in need to the right person at the right time with the appropriate service?

Attached is a brief history of the development of 988 federal structure for your information.

Thank you for your consideration of this essential piece of legislation. I would be more than willing to answer any questions.