



SB 2149

Senate Human Services

January 17, 2023

Katie Fitzsimmons, Director of Student Affairs, NDUS

701.328.4109 | katie.fitzsimmons@ndus.edu

Chair Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, my name is Katie Fitzsimmons and I serve as the Director of Student Affairs for the North Dakota University System. Within that role, I assist the campuses with mental health initiatives, suicide prevention programs, substance misuse prevention, and the spectrum of sexual assault, harassment, and discrimination services. I am here today on behalf of the North Dakota University System and its eleven institutions to provide testimony in support of SB 2149.

SB 2149 provides stabilization for the 988 crisis hotline serviced by FirstLink in Fargo, North Dakota. The North Dakota University System and FirstLink have maintained a partnership to support the mental health of students for at least fifteen years. The partnership we have looks like this: our campus counseling centers forward after-hours calls to FirstLink. If the student is in crisis and needs immediate intervention, FirstLink contacts that campus’s on-call staff as well as any other necessary resources in that moment.

Here are our documented after-hours call statistics from the last six years (January 1, 2017-December 31, 2022):

Total calls	Monthly average # of calls	On-call staff notified
5786	80	59

At one point, the System Office considered suspending this service as only 1% of all fielded calls resulted in the on-call staff being contacted. That was quickly squashed when the immense gratitude and relief of those 59 individuals’ loved ones were considered. The campuses advertise the 988 hotline, FirstLink’s services and trainings, and provide support to reduce the stigma of getting help for mental and behavioral health concerns through many programs. These efforts and connections have saved lives and will continue to do so.

In short, FirstLink offers a service upon which the University System heavily relies. Any support FirstLink receives will continue to benefit our students, faculty, and staff, as well as all North Dakotans.

This concludes my testimony related to SB 2149. I respectfully request the committee carefully consider the far-reaching impact of this bill and move a Do Pass recommendation. I thank you for your time and stand for questions from Committee members.