

**Chairman Nelson and Members of the House Appropriation Committee – Human Resource Division,**

As you consider House Bill 1012, we urge you to prioritize continued and increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline. These critical services are lifelines for our community, providing hope and saving lives when people need it most.

FirstLink, which operates both the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Helpline, has experienced a significant and consistent rise in call, chat, and text volumes. Every month, more individuals turn to these resources, seeking help in their darkest moments. The complexity and urgency of these interactions also continue to grow, with many calls requiring extended time to ensure that individuals in crisis receive the care and compassion they need.

In North Dakota, the urgency of this issue cannot be overstated. Suicide remains a leading cause of death in our state. According to the CDC, North Dakota's suicide rate is above the national average, with more than 130 lives lost to suicide in 2021 alone. These are not just numbers; they represent our neighbors, friends, and family members. Behind every statistic is a person whose life matters and whose potential contributions to our community have been tragically cut short.

Furthermore, rural communities in our state often face unique challenges in accessing mental health care, making the 988 and 211 services even more critical. These helplines bridge gaps in mental health care by providing immediate, confidential, and free support to anyone, anywhere in North Dakota.

We must also acknowledge that no one is immune to the impact of mental health crises—suicide does not discriminate based on age, gender, or socioeconomic status. Supporting House Bill 1012 is not only a legislative action but a moral imperative. By ensuring adequate funding for these helplines, we affirm our commitment to protecting lives and fostering hope in every corner of our state.

We cannot ignore the rising tide of need. Every call answered is an opportunity to prevent tragedy. Every moment of connection provides hope to someone who might otherwise feel hopeless. By funding the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Helpline, we invest in a safer, healthier North Dakota.

Thank you for your consideration and for recognizing the vital importance of these services. We ask for your support of House Bill 1012 to ensure these lifelines remain available for all who need them. Together, we can prevent suicide and build a community where no one feels alone in their struggles.

Sincerely,



Erin Donohoe

Mental Health Advocate, Friend of FirstLink, Suicide Attempt Survivor