

Testimony
SB 2200
February 10, 2025
Senator Kathy Hogan

Chairman Bekkedahl and members of the Appropriations Committee, for the record, my name is Kathy Hogan, I represent District 21 which is central Fargo and a portion of West Fargo.

Senate Bill 2200 was introduced to provide a long-term funding stream for 988 Suicide Prevention Intervention services by establishing a crisis stabilization fund based on up to a 30 cents fee on cell phones like the fees that fund the 911 emergency response structure. The original fiscal note estimated income would be generate \$4.4 million with a \$50,000 cost to set up the fund.

There are devastating impacts of suicide in North Dakota:

- North Dakota has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation, with a rate of 19.3 deaths per 100,000 people, exceeding the national average (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2024).
- In 2022, 143 North Dakotans died by suicide, marking a 33% increase over the past two decades (CDC WONDER, 2023).
- Suicide is the 8th leading cause of death in North Dakota and the 2nd leading cause of death among youth and young adults (ages 10-34) (AFSP, 2024).
- In rural areas, limited access to mental health care contributes to higher suicide rates, making crisis services like FirstLink even more critical.

The Finance and Tax Committee amended the cell fee structures from the bill, but recognized the challenges facing the 988 call center and, therefore, recommended this bill be passed without a funding stream for an additional \$500,000. In the Governor's proposed budget, it calls for \$2,043,330 in funding for 988 services. If this bill were passed, it would increase the reimbursement from 45% of costs to 50% of operational costs. The ND Department of Health Human Services has also expanded crisis response structures through training for law enforcement, the development of the Mental Health Registry and Psychiatric Bed Management system. With the new Certified Behavioral Health Centers, additional resources will be needed, particularly in rural communities.

Another bill SB 2281 also considered by the Finance and Tax Committee increased tobacco taxes by 25 cents/pack and extended that tax rate to electronic cigarettes. This was a very modest tax increase. We would still have the fourth lowest tax rate on tobacco products in the nation: \$.40 cents lower than SD, \$1.01 lower than Montana and \$2.35 lower than Minnesota. That bill is still in committee, but I reference that bill because it designated this increased tax rate to be spent both on 988 Suicide Prevention Intervention and local public health units. It was the intention of SB 2281 to first stabilize the funding for the 988 call center and then build out the local community response infrastructure so that when there is a crisis, local services are available.

FirstLink, the provider of the 988 call response structures, currently is facing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining staff because 80% of their costs are personnel related. We do not expect 911 providers to have to host fundraisers or write grants simply to maintain their basic infrastructure. 988 and mental health needs equitable funding. I hope you support SB 2281 which could build a long-term crisis response, but I hope you can support SB 2200 as a first step.

Finally, the numbers of people seeking help continue to grow. It is truly sad if we as a state are unable to respond to those cries for help. Please support this bill and SB 2281 so that we stabilize our crisis systems to respond to those asking for assistance.

Thank you for your consideration, I am more than willing to answer any questions.

First Link 2025 annual budget.

Equipment Maintenance Supp	1,000
Postage	1,800
Postage Meter Rental	2,200
Employee Recruitment Fees	5,000
Copier Lease	5,500
Training Seminars	7,000
Travel	7,500
Dues - Organizational Mem	11,000
Simple IRA Employer Exp	12,500
Required General Liability	15,000
Technology	50,000
Office Supplies	27,350
Education Awareness	11,000
Telephone/Internet/Technology	71,600
Program Expense	79,000
Professional Fees; bookkeeping, HR, technology management fees	103,500
Office Rent	161,000
Medical Plan Premiums	165,000
Payroll Taxes Expense	175,000
Payroll	1,917,057
TOTAL EXPENSE	2,829,007.00