

Dear Senate Industry and Business Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2200, which seeks to ensure continued and increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline. This funding is critical to sustaining and expanding the services that provide free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans in crisis.

The need for these services is undeniable. FirstLink, the provider of 988 services in North Dakota, reports rising call, chat, and text volumes, which reflect the growing demand for crisis intervention. Suicide remains a leading cause of death in our state, with over 130 lives lost in 2021—surpassing the national average.

As the Care and Support Coordinator for 988, I lead a dedicated team that provides follow-up calls for individuals who have reached out to our helplines or been referred by community partners. We screen for suicidal ideation and address social determinants of care, connecting individuals with the resources they need to stabilize and recover. Every day, our team directly contributes to saving lives.

However, the complexity of the issues we address has significantly increased, requiring more time and specialized care for each case. Calls and texts often extend beyond regular business hours, highlighting the urgent need for additional full-time staff (FTEs) to ensure adequate support is available around the clock. Without increased funding, we risk being unable to meet this growing demand, potentially leaving vulnerable individuals without the help they need during their darkest moments.

I urge you to support SB 2200 to ensure that FirstLink answering the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline have the resources necessary to continue their lifesaving work and to expand their capacity to meet the increasing needs of our community. Thank you for considering this critical legislation and for prioritizing the well-being of North Dakotans.

Sincerely,

Trinity Weber

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