

Dear Chairman, Barta, Vice Chairman Boehm and the Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2200, which relates to the creation of the 988-crisis hotline program, the 988-crisis stabilization fund, the imposition of a 988-access fee, and associated appropriations and infrastructure needs.

My name is Ashley Schmidt, and I am a board member at FirstLink. I know firsthand that this funding is essential to sustaining and expanding the services that provide free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans in crisis. The demand for 988 services continues to grow, with rising call, text, and chat volumes reflecting the urgent and increasing need for mental health and crisis intervention support.

To meet this growing demand, it is critical to increase the number of full-time employees (FTEs) dedicated to 988 services by at least 8. This will ensure that response times remain prompt and that the helpline can effectively address the increasingly complex issues faced by callers, texters, and chat users. Additionally, funding is needed to build out the necessary infrastructure to support this expansion, including technology upgrades and facilities to accommodate an expanded team. Without these investments, we risk delays in service, leaving vulnerable North Dakotans without the help they need during a crisis.

Supporting SB 2200 is a vital step in protecting the mental health and well-being of our communities and ensuring no one in North Dakota has to face a crisis alone. Thank you for considering this important legislation and for your commitment to strengthening mental health services in our state.

Sincerely,  
Ashley Schmidt  
Board Member, FirstLink  
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