

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 essential to sustaining and expanding services that provide free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans in crisis.

As the Coordinator for 988 text and chat services, I oversee a team dedicated to providing immediate and compassionate support through these digital platforms. Many individuals, particularly younger people, feel more comfortable communicating via text or chat rather than over the phone. These platforms often serve as a lifeline for those experiencing suicidal ideation, mental health crises, or other urgent needs. Addressing these complex issues requires specialized care and significant time for each interaction.

The demand for these services continues to grow. Below is a snapshot of the rising need and the time-intensive nature of our work:

- **Phone Interactions Directly Related to Suicide:**
 - **2023:** 5,017 calls
 - **2024 (to date):** 8,175 calls
- **Texts:**
 - **2023:** 459 interactions
 - **2024 (to date):** 1,199 interactions
- **Chats:**
 - **2023:** 566 interactions
 - **2024 (to date):** 1,199 interactions
- **Average Handle Time:**
 - Calls: 12 minutes
 - Texts: 21 minutes
 - Chats: 35 minutes

These numbers illustrate both the increasing complexity of the cases we handle and the growing demand for text and chat services. The extended duration of these interactions further highlights the need for additional resources to ensure timely, effective support for every individual reaching out to us.

Without increased funding, we risk delays in response times and gaps in services, potentially leaving vulnerable individuals without the help they need. Supporting SB 2200 will ensure the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline has the resources to continue its lifesaving work and expand its capacity to meet the needs of our communities.

Your support for this legislation is critical to protecting the well-being of North Dakotans and ensuring no one feels alone during their time of crisis. Thank you for prioritizing mental health and considering this vital bill.

Sincerely,
Rachel Fischer

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