

Dear Chair Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

As a former member of the United States Army, I have witnessed the unique mental health challenges faced by service members and veterans. In 2020, North Dakota reported 23 veteran suicides, resulting in a rate of 41.8 per 100,000—significantly higher than the national veteran suicide rate of 31.7 per 100,000.

These statistics highlight the urgent need for robust mental health support systems. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline offers free, confidential assistance to all North Dakotans, including veterans and service members. FirstLink's increasing call, chat, and text volumes indicate a growing reliance on these services. With suicide remaining a leading cause of death in our state, claiming over 130 lives in 2021, ensuring sustained and increased funding for the 988 Lifeline is imperative.

By supporting SB 2200, we can affirm our commitment to those who have served and to all residents in crisis, ensuring they do not face their struggles alone.

Thank you for considering this critical initiative.

Respectfully
Jonathan Ross
US Army Veteran