

Dear Senate Industry and Business Committee,

I am writing to express 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 experiencing mental health crises.

Discussions with the team at FirstLink reveal the growing demand for 988 services and the significant resources required to meet these needs effectively. The following data demonstrates both the increasing usage of the helpline and the time-intensive nature of the interactions:

- **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 figures reflect both the growing complexity of the cases being addressed and the rising preference for text and chat services. Ensuring adequate resources for these longer, more interactions is essential for providing timely and effective support.

This legislation represents a vital investment in the mental health and well-being of our communities. **It sends a clear message that no one should have to face a mental health crisis alone.**

Thank you for prioritizing mental health and for your consideration of this critical bill.

Sincerely,

Jenna Johnson