

7330 Burnt Creek Loop
Bismarck,ND 58503
January 19, 2025

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2200. My name is Janeen Norland and I am a North Dakota field advocate for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. More importantly, I am a mother whose son died by suicide 16 years ago. This life changing event prompted my work in suicide prevention so no other family has to endure the pain of having a child die.

After many years of advocating for a 3-digit crisis hotline in place of a 10-digit number, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline became a reality. My only regret is that it wasn't available for my son. In his mental health crisis, he made several calls to people that went unanswered as it was late at night. I can't help but think perhaps his life could have been saved had 988 been available.

I share this with you to highlight the importance of providing immediate assistance to individuals in crisis. First Link and similar programs provide this crucial role in our community. In 2023 alone, FirstLink answered 14,284 calls directly related to suicide. The need for intervention continues to grow as witnessed by a 61% increase in calls to 988 in North Dakota between 2022 and 2023.

Stable funding for 988 services through FirstLink and all of the partners is critical for saving the lives of our North Dakota citizens. I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2200 to secure the future of 988 services. It's a very small price to pay.

Sincerely,

Janeen Norland