

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2200. My name is Sara Dukart and I am a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner and a suicide loss survivor. I am writing to emphasize the importance of this legislation in safeguarding critical services such as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

FirstLink and similar programs play a crucial role in our community by providing immediate assistance to individuals facing crises. These services, delivered through phone calls, texts, and chats, often serve as a lifeline for those in need of support, ensuring they are not alone in their darkest moments. I have had patients that because of 988 they did not act on their suicidal ideations and were provided with the care they needed in the moment of their crisis. Knowing that someone will answer their call when they are struggling, is all that is needed sometimes for someone to not act on their suicidal thoughts.

SB 2200 is vital to ensuring that our 988 services have the necessary funding and support to service people across the state of North Dakota who may be struggling and in crisis. This is crucial in our state due to limited mental health care providers, long wait list to see a provider and full emergency room. In 2023 alone, FirstLink answered 14,284 calls directly related to suicide, and between 2022 and 2023 they saw a 61% increase in calls to 988 in North Dakota. The work of FirstLink and all of the partners that make 988 possible is critical to saving lives in our communities.

I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2200 to secure the future of our 988 services.

Sincerely,

Sara Dukart

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American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

North Dakota Board Member