

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

My name is Megan MacFarlane, and I am the Executive Director at M3. At M3, we are dedicated to raising awareness, eliminating the stigma, and connecting resources surrounding mental health. In the last year, I have worked with over 700 youth athletes in North Dakota, and seen firsthand the impact of their mental health on their day-to-day lives. While considering SB 2200, I urge you to think about what increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline could mean for someone in your life.

Mental health challenges do not discriminate by age, gender, or socioeconomic background. Research shows that suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10-14 and the leading cause of death for men under 35. Alarming, nearly 1 in 5 high school students in North Dakota have seriously considered suicide within the last year. For many, the struggle remains hidden due to stigma, embarrassment, or lack of access to help.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is an essential resource in addressing these alarming trends. Available via call or text 24/7, 988 provides free, confidential, and lifesaving support to individuals in crisis. In 2022 alone, over 49,000 Americans died by suicide, with an estimated 1.6 million attempts nationwide. North Dakota is not immune: 135 men in our state tragically died by suicide last year, representing a silent epidemic that we must confront.

This service is especially critical in rural areas, where mental health resources are often scarce. Thirty-one percent of Minnesotans and a significant percentage of North Dakotans live in areas without adequate access to mental health professionals. Without 988, many individuals in crisis would have nowhere to turn.

Beyond saving lives, 988 addresses the broader ripple effects of untreated mental health conditions. For instance, 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, yet it takes an average of 10 years for someone to seek help. By providing immediate assistance, 988 can help bridge this gap, preventing issues from escalating into costly outcomes like incarceration or hospitalization. It is far less costly to invest in increased funding for 988 than it is to continue investing in our incarceration process for those with severe mental illnesses.

The demand for 988 continues to grow, underscoring its necessity. Increased call, chat, and text volumes reported by FirstLink highlight that more North Dakotans are reaching out for help. Sustained and increased funding for 988 is not just a budgetary line item—it is a moral imperative. It sends a message that no one in crisis is alone and that North Dakota prioritizes the mental health of its citizens.

Thank you for your consideration and for supporting this critical initiative. Your support is essential to building stronger, more compassionate, and healthier communities across North Dakota.

Sincerely,

Megan MacFarlane
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