

**TESTIMONY**  
**Senate Industry, Business and Labor Committee**  
**SB 2200**  
**January 20, 2025**  
**Senator Kathy Hogan**

Chairman Barta and members of the Industry Business and Labor Committee, my name is Kathy Hogan, and I represent District 21 which is central Fargo and West Fargo. I am here in support of SB 2200.

In 2020, Congress designated the new 988 dialing code to be operated through the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. 988 is seen as a first step towards a transformed crisis mental health care system in America. With this new federal designation and standards, came many new requirements and regrettably no funding. Throughout the nation many states are now considering implementation of phone fees to fund this program like the funding of 911 systems.

Every community, urban and rural and almost every structure of our society is feeling the behavioral health crisis. Schools, businesses, health care, churches and law enforcement are all begging for help. Over the last 9 years we have added significant resources with substance use vouchers, the new mental health provider registry that was just rolled out in the last 18 months and expansion of crisis response teams and the new Certified Behavioral Health Clinics in some parts of the state, but the response system is not able to keep up with demand. People with serious needs are still waiting. Our jails/prisons are filled with individuals with diagnosed behavioral health problems.

During the bill development in 2023, we worked closing with the Tax Department regarding the language and collection process for phone fees. They requested \$50,000 funding to set up the collection process and felt at that time they could handle this collection process without additional funding.

We also met with the ND Department of Human Services regarding the list of available federal funding options listed in the letter from the wireless telecommunication representative and learned that all those resources are currently designated.

Philosophically I oppose fees, but I recognize that without a funding source this essential infrastructure would probably not be considered for general fund dollars. When 911 was first established, many opposed the fee on phones, but because of the direct relationship between the fee and the service provided, those concerns have dwindled. We need a parallel system for mental health services.

First Link is the private agency currently providing the 988 services. They did receive a startup grant of about \$450,000 in 2022 to purchase some needed additional equipment, but the core funding to answer the calls, maintain all the local resources to respond and to pay a living wage is not there. Some state funding is being provided. This bill will strengthen a critical piece of crisis response network. Attached is a summary document from the National Alliance on Mental Illness regarding the needed continuum of care. In 2024, it appears the FirstLink responded to over 14,000 calls/texts regarding suicide. I have also attached a list of other data on the increase of suicidal thoughts and actions, particularly in young people.

Following this introduction, several people involved in the provision of 988 services, providers of mental health services and advocates will provide more detailed information.

Thank you for your interest in this critical service and I am more than willing to answer any questions.