

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Abby Lange of District 46 and I am a mental health advocate. I am writing to express my strong support for this legislation, as organizations like FirstLink are vital to our community's well-being. These services provide critical support to individuals during some of the hardest moments in their lives. Through calls, texts, and chats, trained professionals offer guidance, emotional support, and safety planning to help individuals in crisis.

As a paramedic for over a decade, I can attest that being with someone during a crisis is a pivotal moment in all lives involved. It is not easy to walk next to someone going through a time when they want to end their life. It is not easy to use only your voice to help someone feel better. No one takes this work more seriously than those working at FirstLink answering the daily 988 calls. Regardless of the difficulty, each day the staff show up and keep grinding at this work, hoping that they are preventing suicide. There are evidence-based practices that are being utilized while talking to these folks on the line. It is not someone just talking willy nilly at a stranger, it is thoughtful conversation.

Each day the team at FirstLink protects life and instills hope all over North Dakota. We need to do the same but ensuring the staff at FirstLink is immune to any legal action. They do not do this work to do anything but help people. We need to make sure they are able to continue to do so without worry.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of SB 2145. By doing so, you are helping to ensure that vital organizations like FirstLink can continue providing these indispensable services to our communities.

Thank you for considering this important matter. If you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

Abby Lange