

Dear Chairman Roers and members of the committee,

Good morning. I am writing in favor of SB 2084, which seeks to increase the state rate for hotel reimbursement. My name is Jennifer Illich and I am the Executive Director of a non-profit agency that provides vital suicide prevention services throughout North Dakota. FirstLink offers suicide screening training, training in the recognition of warning signs, and intervention strategies to individuals across the state.

As part of our work, we write and receive grants to fund these life-saving trainings. A significant portion of our grant agreements requires nonprofits to adhere to the state rate for travel reimbursement, which includes hotel accommodations. However, we have encountered a growing challenge—many hotels in North Dakota no longer offer rooms at or below the state rate. This has become increasingly problematic, as we often need to secure accommodations in rural and underserved areas, where limited options are available.

As a result, FirstLink has had to either seek alternative funding sources to cover the difference in hotel costs, charge agency for the cost, or scale back on the number of programs we can offer, all of which hinder our ability to serve the communities that need us most. The current state reimbursement rate simply does not reflect the rising costs of lodging, particularly in rural areas, and the situation is becoming unsustainable for nonprofits like ours.

This adjustment will allow us to be reimbursed fully from our grants.

I respectfully urge you to support SB 2084, which will help non-profit organizations like FirstLink to continue their important work in our state without being hindered by the growing disparity between reimbursement rates and actual lodging costs. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Illich
Executive Director
FirstLink