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Testimony prepared for:
House Human Services Committee
Prepared January 23, 2023
Kriste Ross, Coroner
Cass County Government

RE: House Bill No. 1390

Committee Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kriste Ross, Coroner for Cass County. I am here in support of House Bill 1390.

I began working in the Cass County Coroner's Office in 2001. Since that time, I have investigated numerous unattended deaths including suicides. After working with families who lost their loved ones to suicide, and often trying to understand "why" a suicide happens, I reached out to Mary Weiler, founder of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention chapter in North Dakota. I wanted to learn more about how to interact with grieving families, have resources available to support loved ones but even just as important, understanding what could have been done to prevent the suicide.

Over the years, I have kept statistics on suicides, drug overdoses, alcohol-related deaths, homicides, accidental deaths, and deaths of minors. Most of these types of deaths currently have a State Fatality Review Panel. I've been involved in local review panels for suicide-related deaths. While the details of how the death occurred are important, it is even more important to know the factors leading up to the death itself. By having these reviews, the information available makes it possible to identify where there are shortcomings in identifying mental health crisis, resources, and educational opportunities.

Statistics show that one death by suicide impacts about 135 family and friends directly. What we also know is that when there is a death in a school, workplace, or church it impacts the co-workers, teachers, student, congregations, and church leaders in a profound way. Some who struggle with mental health issues will need care for months or years to come. I am in support of this bill as I believe that forming this review committee will do what it can to reduce the number of suicide-related deaths, help provide targeted education based on research and generate specific recommendations to our legislative leaders on what to do for our families, survivors, communities, hospitals, schools, and workplaces.

Sincerely,

Kriste Ross
Cass County Government, Coroner
(Reference: Cereal et al., 2018 pg. 5)