



SB 2200

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Chair Ruby and Members of the Committee: My name is Carter Gill, and I am Vice President of Governmental Affairs for the North Dakota Student Association. I am here today in support of SB 2200.

The North Dakota Student Association is dedicated to ensuring that students have a voice at the table in policy that affects higher education. We consist of delegates from each of the 11 public North Dakota University System (NDUS) institutions, meeting monthly to engage students in discussions about North Dakota higher education policy. Since 1969, our mission has been to empower students, create collaboration between the student bodies of the North Dakota public universities, and to provide a student perspective on higher education policy.

During the last few legislative sessions, the NDSA passed [NDSA-13-2223](#): A Resolution in Support of SB 2149: Creating a Suicide Prevention Hotline, and [NDSA-01-2425](#): A Resolution in Support of the NDSA's Legislative Priorities for the 25-27 Biennium. In NDSA-01-2425, the NDSA gives its support for "expanding mental health resources on NDUS campuses." The creation of a 988-crisis hotline would create greater support for NDUS students' mental health. For many students, their lack of access to mental health resources is due in part to what is available on NDUS campuses, through no individual fault of an institution. Throughout the state of North Dakota, it has been difficult for both K-12 schools and institutions of higher education to hire and maintain counselors.¹

¹ We see this difficulty in the introduction of [HB 1449](#): Relation to School Counselor Position Requirements, where the state is changing the requirements for schools to have school counselors hired due to the difficulty in

Another resource that students have available on-campus when they are experiencing a mental health crisis are resident assistants (RA). However, for the most part, RA mental health training exists to get students in a mental health crisis from the point of crisis to a mental health professional. For some institutions, their procedure is to get that student in contact with an institution's mental health counselor, but when there is either no counselor or a part-time counselor, their access may be limited. Access to the 988 hotline would be incredibly useful to help students get the help they need when necessary.

In February, the NDSA hosted a presentation from a representative from FirstLink to show NDSA delegates what happens when someone dials 988 and the work behind the scenes to make this service possible. In regard to the aforementioned contributors to the worsening of student mental health, it is imperative that the state of North Dakota expands this resource to not just students in North Dakota, but everyone who needs this service in the state.

All of this considered, on behalf of the NDSA, I ask that this committee give SB 2200 a DO PASS recommendation.

maintaining counselors in schools. This article here from the [University of Mary](#) includes some additional information on the state of K-12 counselors.