

SB 2200 TESTIMONY
House Human Services Committee
March 18, 2025
Senator Kathy Hogan

Chairman Ruby and members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Kathy Hogan, and I represent District 21 which is central Fargo and a portion of 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.

Senate bill 2200 was originally designed to add a new monthly fee for phones similar to the monthly 911 fee to fund a range of suicide intervention services including the 988 crisis system. The bill was heard in the Business and Industry Committee. After hearing the stories and the needs, the committee decided that they didn't want to deal with the proposed phone line fee, but they did want to support the 988 Crisis Response System at First Link, so they recommended that

this program be funded with an additional \$700,000 in the ND Department of Health and Human Services. The bill then moved to the Appropriations Committee where the allocation was lowered to \$500,000.

First Link is the private agency currently providing the 988 services. This bill will strengthen a critical piece of crisis response network. In 2024, it appears the FirstLink responded to over 14,000 calls/texts regarding suicide. 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.