

Dear Chairman Barta, Vice Chairman Boehm and the Members of the Industry and Business Committee,
I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2200, which relates to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program, the 988 crisis stabilization fund, the imposition of a 988 access fee, and associated appropriations and infrastructure needs.

I am well aware of the effects of suicide and self harm. I'm related to people who have carried these acts out. It is a tragedy when these things happen. Not only does it affect the person committing the acts, but as these acts are carried out, it affects our community as a whole - very negatively. When you save one person, it exponentially saves others. The people who are close to the victims of suicide sometimes choose the same path, or other harmful coping mechanisms, such as drug and alcohol abuse, while dwelling on the lost ones. It's imperative that 988 receives funding, not only to save the lives of ones actively hurting, but to save the lives of people in the future who that one suicide affects.

As a board member at FirstLink; I've seen the numbers and have seen firsthand that this funding is essential to sustaining and expanding the crisis services provided to North Dakotans in crisis. The simplicity of having such an easy number to save lives helps incredibly. The demand for 988 services continues to grow, with rising call, text, and chat volumes reflecting the urgent and increasing need for mental health and crisis intervention support.

To meet this growing demand, it is critical to increase the number of full-time employees (FTEs) dedicated to 988 services by at least 8. This will ensure that response times remain prompt and that the helpline can effectively address the increasingly complex issues faced by callers, texters, and chat users. Additionally, funding is needed to build out the necessary infrastructure to support this expansion, including technology upgrades and facilities to accommodate an expanded team. Without these investments, we risk delays in service, leaving vulnerable North Dakotans without the help they need during a crisis.

I support SB 2200 with all my heart and believe it is a vital step in protecting the mental health and well-being of our communities and ensuring no one in North Dakota has to face a crisis alone. Thank you for considering this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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Board Member, FirstLink

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