

**2025 SENATE JUDICIARY**

**SB 2145**

# 2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

## Judiciary Committee Peace Garden Room, State Capitol

SB 2145  
1/14/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 32-03 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to providing immunity to an employee of a 988 suicide and crisis lifeline, 211 information and referral helpline, and 911 system.

10:46 a.m. Chair Larson opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chair Larson, Vice-Chair Paulson, Senators Braunberger, Castaneda, Cory, Luick, Myrdal.

### Discussion Topics:

- Safety Plan Development
- Crisis Lifeline Confidentiality and Liability

10:46 a.m. Senator Roers, introduced the bill and testified in favor.

10:50 a.m. Jennifer Illich, FirstLink Executive Director, testified in favor and submitted testimony #28654.

10:57 a.m. Chair Larson closed the hearing.

10:58 a.m. Senator Luick moved a Do Pass.

10:58 a.m. Senator Braunberger seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Diane Larson	Y
Senator Bob Paulson	Y
Senator Ryan Braunberger	Y
Senator Jose L. Castaneda	Y
Senator Claire Cory	Y
Senator Larry Luick	Y
Senator Janne Myrdal	Y

Motion passed 7-0-0.

Senator Braunberger will carry the bill.

10:59 a.m. Chair Larson closed the hearing.

**Additional Written Testimony:**

#28669, #28670, #28688, #28720, #28721, #28746, #28755, #28767, #28769, #28770, #28778, #28804, #28807, #28833, #28848, #28852, #28858, #28870, #28873, & #28905.

*Kendra McCann, Committee Clerk*

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE**  
**SB 2145 ([25.0077.02000](#))**

**Judiciary Committee (Sen. Larson, Chairman)** recommends **DO PASS** (7 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). SB 2145 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.

**Dear Members of the Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Jennifer Illich, and I am the Executive Director of FirstLink. FirstLink serves a critical role in our community by answering the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline. Every day, our team answers calls, texts, and chats, helping individuals in crisis develop safety plans to prevent suicide and save lives.

The passage of **SB 2145** is vital to ensuring that the team members who staff the 988 and 211 lines are granted immunity when performing their essential, life-saving work. FirstLink adheres to the **highest standards of practice**, following best practices and procedures set forth by our two national accreditations: the **American Association of Suicidology (AAS)** and **InformUSA**.

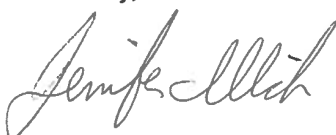
Additionally, we strictly comply with **research-based standards** outlined in the Network Agreement, developed in collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (**SAMHSA**) and **Vibrant Emotional Health**. These guidelines ensure that our team operates with professionalism, compassion, and care while maintaining the trust and safety of those we serve.

Providing immunity for the work performed on these helplines is critical to sustaining the confidence and resilience of the individuals who dedicate themselves to this important mission. It not only protects the workers who are saving lives daily but also reinforces the integrity and reliability of the services we provide.

I urge you to support SB 2145 and ensure that FirstLink and other organizations like ours can continue to provide these indispensable services to our communities.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to addressing this urgent matter. I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information if needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jennifer Illich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jennifer" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Illich".

Jennifer Illich

Executive Director, FirstLink

**Dear Members of the Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Trinity Weber, and I am a friend of FirstLink. I am writing to highlight the critical importance of this legislation in supporting life-saving services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

Organizations like FirstLink are essential to the well-being of our communities, providing vital support to individuals in moments of crisis. The passage of SB 2145 is necessary to protect these services by granting immunity to the professionals who dedicate themselves to answering calls, texts, and chats from those in need.

These services are built on evidence-based practices and adhere to the rigorous standards outlined in the Network Agreement, developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health. Such measures ensure that every person in crisis receives compassionate and professional care of the highest quality.

Granting immunity to those staffing these helplines is about more than protecting the individuals doing this crucial work. It ensures the stability, trust, and continuity of the services that so many people rely on during their most vulnerable moments. Passing this legislation reflects a commitment to prioritizing mental health and the safety of our community members.

I strongly encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2145 to help ensure that organizations like FirstLink can continue their mission of saving lives and providing invaluable support to our communities.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and for your dedication to improving the lives of North Dakotans. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,  
Trinity Weber

**Dear Members of the Committee,**

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Dallas Tufty, and I am a huge advocate for mental health. I am writing to emphasize the importance of this legislation in preserving the integrity of services such as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

Organizations like FirstLink play a crucial role in supporting individuals during times of crisis, providing compassionate care and helping develop life-saving plans. These services are indispensable to our community, and the professionals who deliver them deserve our full support.

SB 2145 ensures that these professionals are granted immunity as they carry out their important work. By adhering to best practices and standards set by organizations such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health, they maintain the highest level of care for those in need.

Passing this legislation demonstrates North Dakota's commitment to mental health and recognizes the value of protecting the people who dedicate their lives to helping others. Without this support, the sustainability of these vital resources could be at risk.

I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2145 and take this important step toward supporting the mental health and safety of our community.

Thank you for your consideration. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dallas Tufty', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Dallas Tufty

Dear Members of the Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Ashley Lemke, and I serve as the Director of Workforce and Culture at FirstLink. FirstLink is proud to be a cornerstone of our community, answering the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline. Every day, our team answers calls, texts, and chats, helping individuals in crisis develop safety plans to prevent suicide and save lives.

The passage of SB 2145 is crucial to ensuring the safety and well-being of the individuals who staff these lines. By granting immunity to our team members, this bill would help protect the essential and often life-saving work that we do each day. At FirstLink, we uphold the highest standards in the field, adhering to best practices as outlined by our national accreditations from the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) and InformUSA. We also follow the research-based guidelines established through the Network Agreement, created in partnership with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health. These standards ensure that our team operates with the utmost professionalism and care in every interaction.

Providing legal immunity for those doing this work is a necessary step to ensure that our team members can continue to provide support with confidence and security. It not only protects those working on the front lines but also upholds the integrity and trust of the services we provide to those in need.

I strongly urge your support for SB 2145. This bill will ensure the continued success of FirstLink and similar organizations, allowing us to continue providing these lifesaving services to the communities we serve.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Ashley Lemke  
Director of Workforce and Culture, FirstLink



Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Rebecca Collins, and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. I am writing to emphasize the importance of this legislation in safeguarding critical services such as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

FirstLink and similar programs play a crucial role in our community by providing immediate assistance to individuals facing crises. These services, delivered through phone calls, texts, and chats, often serve as a lifeline for those in need of support, ensuring they are not alone in their darkest moments.

SB 2145 is vital to protecting the professionals who perform this essential work. By granting them immunity, we ensure they can continue serving the community without unnecessary legal concerns. These services are conducted according to evidence-based guidelines and best practices outlined by SAMHSA and Vibrant Emotional Health, which guarantee the highest level of care for those reaching out for help.

This legislation is not just about protecting individual workers but also about ensuring that these life-saving resources remain reliable and accessible. Supporting SB 2145 demonstrates North Dakota's dedication to improving mental health and protecting those who provide critical care to our communities.

I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2145 to secure the future of these indispensable services and the well-being of the individuals who rely on them.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this important issue. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or need further details.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca Collins".

Rebecca Collins, LCSW  
Emergency Department Social Worker  
C - 701-200-0197  
Email: collireb@gmail.com

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Abby Lange of District 46 and I am a mental health advocate. I am writing to express my strong support for this legislation, as organizations like FirstLink are vital to our community's well-being. These services provide critical support to individuals during some of the hardest moments in their lives. Through calls, texts, and chats, trained professionals offer guidance, emotional support, and safety planning to help individuals in crisis.

As a paramedic for over a decade, I can attest that being with someone during a crisis is a pivotal moment in all lives involved. It is not easy to walk next to someone going through a time when they want to end their life. It is not easy to use only your voice to help someone feel better. No one takes this work more seriously than those working at FirstLink answering the daily 988 calls. Regardless of the difficulty, each day the staff show up and keep grinding at this work, hoping that they are preventing suicide. There are evidence-based practices that are being utilized while talking to these folks on the line. It is not someone just talking willy nilly at a stranger, it is thoughtful conversation.

Each day the team at FirstLink protects life and instills hope all over North Dakota. We need to do the same but ensuring the staff at FirstLink is immune to any legal action. They do not do this work to do anything but help people. We need to make sure they are able to continue to do so without worry.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of SB 2145. By doing so, you are helping to ensure that vital organizations like FirstLink can continue providing these indispensable services to our communities.

Thank you for considering this important matter. If you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

Abby Lange

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Mary Krueger, and I am the Health and Wellness Coordinator for the Fargo Police Department. I am writing to emphasize the importance of this legislation in safeguarding critical services such as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

FirstLink and similar programs play a crucial role in our community by providing immediate assistance to individuals facing crises. These services, delivered through phone calls, texts, and chats, often serve as a lifeline for those in need of support, ensuring they are not alone in their darkest moments.

SB 2145 is vital to protecting the professionals who perform this essential work. By granting them immunity, we ensure they can continue serving the community without unnecessary legal concerns. These services are conducted according to evidence-based guidelines and best practices outlined by SAMHSA and Vibrant Emotional Health, which guarantee the highest level of care for those reaching out for help.

This legislation is not just about protecting individual workers but also about ensuring that these life-saving resources remain reliable and accessible. Supporting SB 2145 demonstrates North Dakota's dedication to improving mental health and protecting those who provide critical care to our communities.

I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2145 to secure the future of these indispensable services and the well-being of the individuals who rely on them.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this important issue. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or need further details.

Sincerely,  
Mary Krueger

**Dear Members of the Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Angela. I am a mental health advocate. I am writing to highlight the importance of this bill in protecting life-saving services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

FirstLink and similar programs provide an essential safety net for individuals in crisis. Each day, trained professionals answer calls, texts, and chats, offering emotional support, guidance, and practical help to those in need.

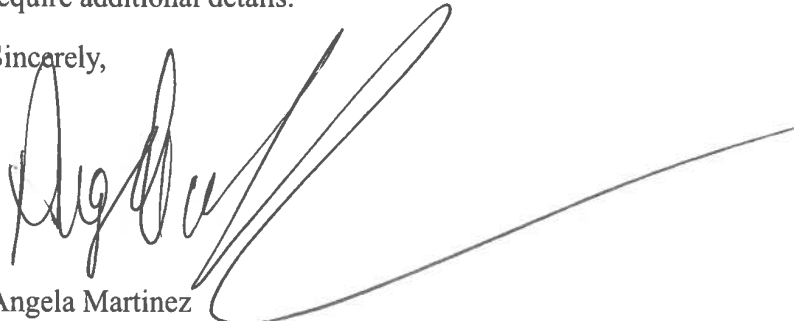
The immunity provided through SB 2145 is critical to ensure that these professionals can continue their work without fear of legal repercussions. These services operate under evidence-based guidelines developed by respected organizations such as SAMHSA and Vibrant Emotional Health, ensuring the highest quality of care for all who reach out.

This legislation goes beyond protecting individual workers—it safeguards the stability and reliability of resources that countless people depend on. By supporting this bill, North Dakota affirms its commitment to mental health and to the well-being of its residents.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of SB 2145 and to continue supporting the invaluable work of organizations like FirstLink.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional details.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela Martinez', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Angela Martinez

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Hailey Abrahamson, and I am an advocate in the mental health field. I am writing to highlight the importance of this bill in protecting life-saving services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

FirstLink and similar programs provide an essential safety net for individuals in crisis. Each day, trained professionals answer calls, texts, and chats, offering emotional support, guidance, and practical help to those in need.

The immunity provided through SB 2145 is critical to ensuring that these professionals can continue their work without fear of legal repercussions. These services operate under evidence-based guidelines developed by respected organizations such as SAMHSA and Vibrant Emotional Health, ensuring the highest quality of care for all who reach out.

This legislation goes beyond protecting individual workers—it safeguards the stability and reliability of resources that countless people depend on. By supporting this bill, North Dakota affirms its commitment to mental health and to the well-being of its residents.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of SB 2145 and to continue supporting the invaluable work of organizations like FirstLink.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional details.

Sincerely,

Hailey Abrahamson

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hailey Abrahamson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

**Dear Members of the Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Rachel Fischer and I am a person who understands the importance of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. I am writing to emphasize the vital importance of this legislation in safeguarding life-saving services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

Programs like FirstLink are indispensable to the well-being of our community, providing critical assistance to individuals during moments of profound need. Whether it's through a phone call, text, or chat, these helplines are often the first lifeline for people in crisis, offering compassionate support and practical guidance.

The passage of SB 2145 is essential to ensuring these services remain effective and reliable by granting immunity to the professionals who dedicate themselves to answering these urgent calls. These individuals operate under rigorous, evidence-based guidelines outlined in the Network Agreement developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health. These high standards guarantee that individuals in crisis receive care of the highest quality.

Granting immunity is not just about protecting the professionals performing this crucial work; it also reinforces the trust and continuity of services that countless people depend on during their most vulnerable moments. Supporting SB 2145 demonstrates a clear commitment to prioritizing mental health and ensuring the safety of those who rely on these essential resources.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of SB 2145 to help sustain the life-saving work of organizations like FirstLink and to continue supporting the mental health and well-being of North Dakotans.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to this critical issue. If you have any questions or need further information, please feel free to reach out.

Sincerely,  
Rachel Fischer

*Dear Members of the Committee,*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Terry Lausch, and I am an advocate of FirstLink. I am writing to stress the importance of this legislation and its role in supporting essential services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

Programs like FirstLink are vital to our community, offering a lifeline to individuals during moments of crisis. By answering calls, texts, and chats, trained professionals provide life-saving support and guidance to those in need.

The passage of SB 2145 is critical to ensure that these professionals are protected through immunity while performing their essential work. Their efforts are guided by evidence-based practices and adhere to the rigorous standards established in the Network Agreement developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health.

This bill not only safeguards the individuals who provide these services but also reinforces the trust and dependability of resources that so many rely on. By passing this legislation, the state demonstrates its commitment to prioritizing mental health and the well-being of its residents.

I strongly urge you to support SB 2145 and help ensure that organizations like FirstLink can continue their critical mission.

Thank you for your attention and for your dedication to improving the lives of North Dakotans. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Terry Lausch

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terry Lausch', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Terry Lausch  
**FirstLink Advocate**  
terrylausch@gmail.com  
701-200-5024

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Aaliyah Martinez, and I am a mental health advocate. I am writing to stress the importance of this legislation and its role in supporting essential services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

Programs like FirstLink are vital to our community, offering a lifeline to individuals during moments of crisis. By answering calls, texts, and chats, trained professionals provide life-saving support and guidance to those in need.

The passage of SB 2145 is critical to ensure that these professionals are protected through immunity while performing their essential work. Their efforts are guided by evidence-based practices and adhere to the rigorous standards established in the Network Agreement developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health.

This bill not only safeguards the individuals who provide these services but also reinforces the trust and dependability of resources that so many rely on. By passing this legislation, the state demonstrates its commitment to prioritizing mental health and the well-being of its residents.

I strongly urge you to support SB 2145 and help ensure that organizations like FirstLink can continue their critical mission.

Thank you for your attention and for your dedication to improving the lives of North Dakotans. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aaliyah Martinez". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Aaliyah Martinez, Mental Health Advocate



Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Karen Nitzkowski, a North Dakota resident and former West Fargo School Board Member. I am writing to emphasize the importance of this legislation in safeguarding critical services such as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

FirstLink and similar programs play a crucial role in our community by providing immediate assistance to individuals facing crises. These services, delivered through phone calls, texts, and chats, often serve as a lifeline for those in need of support, ensuring they are not alone in their darkest moments.

SB 2145 is vital to protecting the professionals who perform this essential work. By granting them immunity, we ensure they can continue serving the community without unnecessary legal concerns. These services are conducted according to evidence-based guidelines and best practices outlined by SAMHSA and Vibrant Emotional Health, which guarantee the highest level of care for those reaching out for help.

This legislation is about protecting individual workers and ensuring that these life-saving resources remain reliable and accessible. Supporting SB 2145 demonstrates North Dakota's dedication to improving mental health and protecting those who provide critical care to our communities.

I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2145 to secure the future of these indispensable services and the well-being of the individuals who rely on them.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Karen Nitzkowski

4711 105<sup>th</sup> St N

Harwood, ND. 58042

701-371-9644

**Dear Members of the Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Shannon LaHaise, and I am the Director for the Grand Forks Public Safety Answering Point/911 Center; a 911 professional dedicated to delivering critical emergency services to our community. I am writing to highlight the importance of this legislation in safeguarding essential services, including 911 Dispatch, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

SB 2145 is vital to protecting these professionals who provide these critical services. By granting immunity to 911, 988, and 211 staff, this legislation ensures that these teams can continue their essential work without the fear of unnecessary legal repercussions. These protections enable us to focus on what truly matters—saving lives and providing compassionate, reliable support to individuals in crisis.

This legislation is not only about protecting the individuals who answer these calls but also about maintaining the stability and accessibility of these life-saving services for the countless people who depend on them. Supporting SB 2145 sends a clear message that North Dakota is committed to prioritizing mental health, public safety, and the well-being of its residents.

I strongly urge you to vote in favor of SB 2145 to help secure the future of these indispensable services and to ensure that the professionals who dedicate their careers to saving lives are supported and protected.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to addressing this critical issue. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,  
*Shannon LaHaise*

Shannon LaHaise

Grand Forks PSAP, Director

**Dear Members of the Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Ashley Ladbury Hrichena, and I am a community member and mental health advocate. I am writing to highlight the importance of this bill in protecting life-saving services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

These lines provide an essential safety net for individuals in crisis. Each day, trained professionals answer calls, texts, and chats to offer emotional support and connection to services that people in crisis need.

The immunity provided through SB 2145 is critical to ensuring that these professionals can continue their work without fear of legal repercussions. These services operate under evidence-based guidelines developed by respected organizations such as SAMHSA and Vibrant Emotional Health, ensuring the highest quality of care for all who reach out.

I strongly encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2145 to help ensure that organizations like FirstLink can continue their mission of saving lives and providing invaluable support to our communities. By supporting this bill, North Dakota affirms its commitment to mental health and to the well-being of its residents

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional details.

Sincerely,

Ashley Ladbury Hrichena

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ashley Ladbury Hrichena". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Erin Donohoe, and I am a mental health advocate. I am writing to highlight the critical importance of this legislation in supporting life-saving services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

Organizations like FirstLink are essential to the well-being of our communities, providing vital support to individuals in moments of crisis. The passage of SB 2145 is necessary to protect these services by granting immunity to the professionals who dedicate themselves to answering calls, texts, and chats from those in need.

These services are built on evidence-based practices and adhere to the rigorous standards outlined in the Network Agreement, developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health. Such measures ensure that every person in crisis receives compassionate and professional care of the highest quality.

Granting immunity to those staffing these helplines is about more than protecting the individuals doing this crucial work. It ensures the stability, trust, and continuity of the services that so many people rely on during their most vulnerable moments. Passing this legislation reflects a commitment to prioritizing mental health and the safety of our community members.

I strongly encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2145 to help ensure that organizations like FirstLink can continue their mission of saving lives and providing invaluable support to our communities.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and for your dedication to improving the lives of North Dakotans. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin Donohoe", written in a cursive style.

Erin Donohoe

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Tamara Kelly, and I am a mental health advocate. I am writing to highlight the critical importance of this legislation in supporting life-saving services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

Organizations like FirstLink are essential to the well-being of our communities, providing vital support to individuals in moments of crisis. The passage of SB 2145 is necessary to protect these services by granting immunity to the professionals who dedicate themselves to answering calls, texts, and chats from those in need.

These services are built on evidence-based practices and adhere to the rigorous standards outlined in the Network Agreement, developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health. Such measures ensure that every person in crisis receives compassionate and professional care of the highest quality.

Granting immunity to those staffing these helplines is about more than protecting the individuals doing this crucial work. It ensures the stability, trust, and continuity of the services that so many people rely on during their most vulnerable moments. Passing this legislation reflects a commitment to prioritizing mental health and the safety of our community members.

I strongly encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2145 to help ensure that organizations like FirstLink can continue their mission of saving lives and providing invaluable support to our communities.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and for your dedication to improving the lives of North Dakotans. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

Tamara Kelly

**Senate Judiciary Committee  
Jan 14th, 2025 HB SB 2145  
Testimony in Support**

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Dear Chair Larson and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I urge a "Do Pass" on SB 2145.

I am a suicide prevention advocate, and I work with many first responders, be they 988 call specialists, firefighters, police, or EMS. These calls by their nature are emergency situations, and our first responders are often going into unpredictable environments.

I believe in our first responders to do the best possible job to help individuals and situations and save lives. They do this every day. However, there are always going to be situations in which there could be no winning outcome. And often in those scenarios there are families who are grieving that may want to put the blame somewhere, whether it is fair or not to do so.

The job of being a first responder is intensely stressful, the secondary trauma can often result in PTSD for those who work it, and the added stress that any mishap could result in personal liability is at least one thing we can remove from the equation. The bill doesn't protect for situations where our first responders are clearly at fault but does give peace of mind for the folks doing some of the most difficult work in this state. And that's why I support this.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state,  
Faye Seidler

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Krista Frenzel, and I am a mental health advocate. I am writing to highlight the critical importance of this legislation in supporting life-saving services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

Organizations like FirstLink are essential to the well-being of our communities, providing vital support to individuals in moments of crisis. The passage of SB 2145 is necessary to protect these services by granting immunity to the professionals who dedicate themselves to answering calls, texts, and chats from those in need.

These services are built on evidence-based practices and adhere to the rigorous standards outlined in the Network Agreement, developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health. Such measures ensure that every person in crisis receives compassionate and professional care of the highest quality.

Granting immunity to those staffing these helplines is about more than protecting the individuals doing this crucial work. It ensures the stability, trust, and continuity of the services that so many people rely on during their most vulnerable moments. Passing this legislation reflects a commitment to prioritizing mental health and the safety of our community members.

I strongly encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2145 to help ensure that organizations like FirstLink can continue their mission of saving lives and providing invaluable support to our communities.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and for your dedication to improving the lives of North Dakotans. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,



Krista Frenzel

Catherine Benton  
SB 2145  
January 13, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145.

I am writing to emphasize the critical importance of this legislation in supporting essential services like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

Programs like FirstLink are vital to our community, offering a lifeline to individuals during moments of crisis. By answering calls, texts, and chats, trained professionals provide life-saving support and guidance to those in need. These services ensure that individuals facing crises are not alone and receive the immediate assistance they require.

The passage of SB 2145 is crucial to protect the professionals who perform this essential work. By granting them immunity, we ensure they can continue serving the community without unnecessary legal concerns. Their efforts are guided by evidence-based practices and adhere to the rigorous standards established in the Network Agreement developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health.

This bill not only safeguards the individuals who provide these services but also reinforces the trust and dependability of resources that so many rely on. By passing this legislation, the state demonstrates its commitment to prioritizing mental health and the well-being of its residents.

I strongly urge you to support SB 2145 and help ensure that organizations like FirstLink can continue their critical mission. Your vote in favor of this bill is a vote to secure the future of these indispensable services and the well-being of the individuals who rely on them.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this important issue. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information.

Your consideration is very much appreciated

Catherine Benton

[clbenton@hotmail.com](mailto:clbenton@hotmail.com)

701.412.7917



Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Jeremy Brown, and I am the Director of Data Quality at FirstLink. I am writing to emphasize the importance of this legislation in preserving the integrity of services such as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline.

Organizations like FirstLink play a crucial role in supporting individuals during times of crisis, providing compassionate care and helping develop life-saving plans. These services are indispensable to our community, and the professionals who deliver them deserve our full support.

SB 2145 ensures that these professionals are granted immunity as they carry out their important work. By adhering to best practices and standards set by organizations such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health, they maintain the highest level of care for those in need.

Passing this legislation demonstrates North Dakota's commitment to mental health and recognizes the value of protecting the people who dedicate their lives to helping others. Without this support, the sustainability of these vital resources could be at risk.

I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2145 and take this important step toward supporting the mental health and safety of our community.

Thank you for your consideration. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JB', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Jeremy Brown

**2025 HOUSE JUDICIARY**

**SB 2145**

# 2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Judiciary Committee**  
Room JW327B, State Capitol

SB 2145  
2/24/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 32-03 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to providing immunity to an employee of a 988 suicide and crisis lifeline, 211 information and referral helpline, and 911 system.

9:00 a.m. Chairman Klemin opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Klemin, Vice-Chairman Karls, Vice-Chairman Vetter, Representatives Christianson, Henderson, Hoverson, Johnston, McLeod, S. Olson, Satrom, Tveit, Wolff, Schneider

Members Absent: Representative VanWinkle

## **Discussion Topics:**

- Suing of 911 operators
- 988 and 211 operator training
- Volume of suicide and crisis lifeline calls

9:02 a.m. Jennifer Illich, Executive Director of FirstLink, testified in favor and provided testimony #37899 and #38340.

9:12 a.m. Representative Schneider moved a Do Pass.

9:12 a.m. Representative McLeod seconded the motion.

<b>Representatives</b>	<b>Vote</b>
Representative Lawrence R. Klemin	Y
Representative Karen Karls	Y
Representative Steve Vetter	Y
Representative Nels Christianson	Y
Representative Donna Henderson	Y
Representative Jeff Hoverson	Y
Representative Daniel Johnston	Y
Representative Carrie McLeod	Y
Representative SuAnn Olson	Y
Representative Bernie Satrom	Y
Representative Mary Schneider	Y
Representative Bill Tveit	Y
Representative Lori VanWinkle	A
Representative Christina Wolff	Y

9:13 a.m. Motion passed 13-0-1

9:13 a.m. Representative Schneider will carry the bill.

**Additional written testimony:**

Ashley Lemke, Director of Workforce and Culture at FirstLink, submitted testimony in favor #38017

Jeremy Brown, Director of Data Quality at FirstLink, submitted testimony in favor #38065

9:13 a.m. Chairman Klemin closed the hearing.

*Wyatt Armstrong, Committee Clerk*

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE**  
**SB 2145 ([25.0077.02000](#))**

**Judiciary Committee (Rep. Klemin, Chairman)** recommends **DO PASS** (13 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). SB 2145 was placed on the Fourteenth order on the calendar.



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**Dear Chairman Klemin and Members of the Judiciary Committee,**

My name is Jennifer Illich, and I am the Executive Director at FirstLink. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2145, which provides immunity to employees of the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline, the 211 information and referral helpline, and the 911 system.

988 and 211 are essential mental health resources that provide life-saving support to individuals in crisis. However, without liability coverage, these critical services remain vulnerable to legal and financial risks that could hinder their effectiveness and availability.

Call specialists working within the 988 and 211 systems are often faced with high-stakes decision-making under immense pressure. If adverse outcomes occur, lawsuits could arise, placing financial strain on helplines, their operators, and the broader mental health support system. Liability protections would serve as a necessary safeguard, ensuring that legal challenges do not threaten the existence or efficiency of these crucial services.

Furthermore, providing liability protection would reinforce public trust in the 988 and 211 systems. Call specialists would have the security needed to provide compassionate, professional, and thorough assistance without fear of personal or institutional repercussions. This assurance would also help attract and retain skilled professionals, strengthening the crisis intervention network.

Ensuring legal protections for 988 and 211 employees aligns with best practices seen in other essential public services, such as emergency medical response and law enforcement. Just as these professionals receive legal protections while carrying out their duties, 988 responders should have similar safeguards to continue their critical work without undue legal vulnerabilities.

Protecting those who provide life-saving care is both a moral obligation and a practical necessity. Liability protections for 988 and 211 services would safeguard these essential helplines, their operators, and, most importantly, the individuals who rely on them during their most vulnerable moments.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and look forward to your response.

**Sincerely,**  
Jennifer Illich

Executive Director, FirstLink

Dear Chairman Klemin and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2145, which seeks to establish essential legal protection for employees working within the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, the 211 Information and Referral Helpline, and the 911 system. My name is Ashley Lemke, and I serve as the Director of Workforce and Culture at FirstLink, where I oversee the dedicated professionals responding to these critical services.

Every day, individuals in crisis rely on 988 and 211, which are both managed by FirstLink and available 24/7/365 through call, text, or online chat. These free, confidential services offer immediate assistance to those experiencing mental health emergencies or seeking vital community resources. Last year alone, FirstLink fielded tens of thousands of interactions, underscoring the essential role these helplines play in our crisis response system. However, without proper liability protections, these services remain vulnerable to financial and legal risks that could threaten their effectiveness and accessibility.

Crisis call specialists are required to make split-second, high-pressure decisions while offering critical support. Their work is governed by rigorous national accreditation standards—Inform USA and the American Association of Suicidology (AAS)—as well as the Vibrant Network Agreement, which aligns with best practices set by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Despite their adherence to research-backed methodologies, every crisis presents unique challenges, and adverse outcomes can still occur. The risk of legal action not only jeopardizes FirstLink's financial stability but may also deter individuals from seeking the support they need due to concerns about unintended consequences.

By enacting liability protections, we can strengthen public trust in these vital services and ensure their sustainability. Call specialists will feel secure in their roles, allowing them to provide compassionate, professional assistance without fear of legal repercussions. Additionally, these protections will aid in the recruitment and retention of highly qualified individuals, reinforcing the resilience of our crisis intervention infrastructure.

Similar legal protections already exist for emergency medical personnel and law enforcement officers. It is both fair and necessary to extend these same safeguards to 988 and 211 responders, enabling them to continue their life-saving work without undue legal exposure.

Providing liability coverage for those who offer crisis support is not only a sound policy decision—it is a moral obligation. By supporting SB 2145, we can protect these critical services, safeguard the professionals who staff them, and ensure continued assistance for individuals in their most vulnerable moments.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions or further discussion on this matter.

Sincerely,

Ashley Lemke

Dear Chairman Klemin and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Jeremy Brown, and I am the Director of Data Quality at FirstLink. I am testifying in support of SB 2145, which provides immunity to employees of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, 211 Information & Referral Helpline, and the 911 system.

988 and 211 are both answered locally in North Dakota by FirstLink. These phone lines are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to provide supportive listening, access to local resources, de-escalation of crisis, and safety planning during instances of suicide, substance use, self-harm, or other potentially life-threatening situations. Without liability protection, the crucial support provided by our team of well-intended, well-trained, compassionate individuals remain vulnerable to legal and financial risks that could limit their ability to offer help to those in need.

At FirstLink, beyond the numerous accreditations our agency holds and over 50 years of experience assisting individuals facing a crisis, our agency has a meaningful relationship with Vibrant Emotional Health, the agency which oversees the national 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline network. As part of the 988 Lifeline network, FirstLink must adhere to the Vibrant Network Agreement, which provides procedures and protocols for navigating crisis situations of all types, with the goal to de-escalate, safety plan, and resolve by phone. To meet the requirements of this agreement, our staff are supported through a lengthy and rigorous training curriculum including nationally accredited training programs for suicide intervention. This combination of training and guiding procedures enables our staff to provide life-saving support utilizing their skills, judgement, and resources. However, every crisis is unique, and adverse outcomes can still occur.

Providing liability protections would ensure our Call Specialists feel confident in their ability to provide compassionate, professional support without fear of legal repercussions. This would naturally help FirstLink, and 911 dispatch centers across the state, attract and retain qualified, passionate individuals for these roles, strengthening our crisis response and intervention system in North Dakota.

I urge you to support SB 2145 so that those who respond to North Dakotans reaching 988, 211, or 911 in life's most difficult moments are protected by similar safeguards as emergency medical personnel and law enforcement, allowing them to provide life-saving support without unnecessary legal risk.

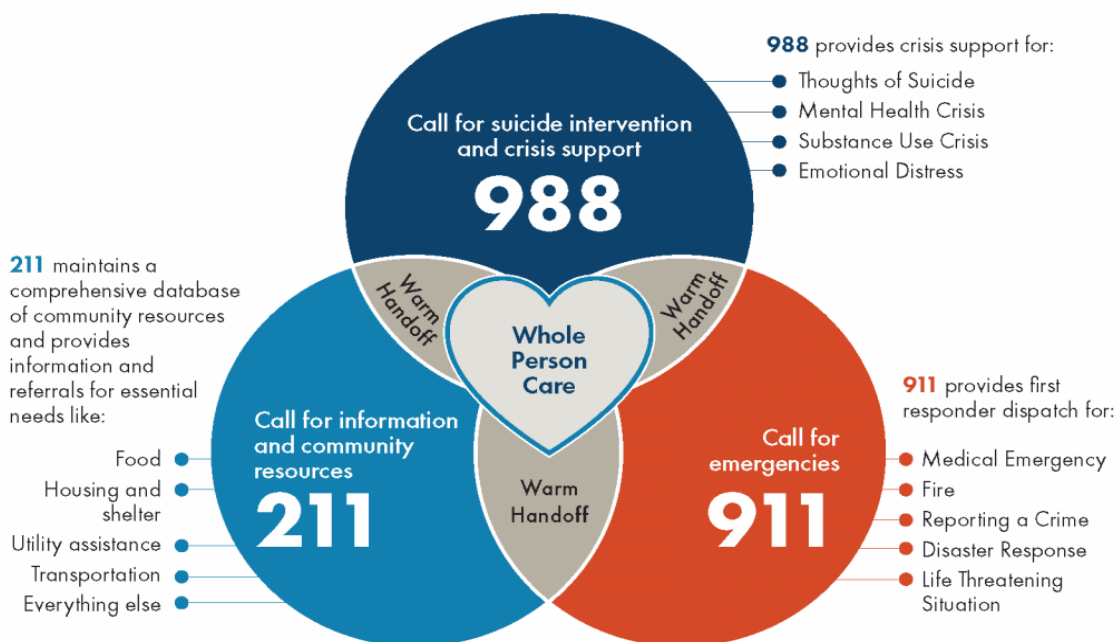
Thank you for your time and consideration of this legislation. I look forward to any further discussion or questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Brown



# Help is **3** Numbers Away



**988** | SUICIDE & CRISIS  
LIFELINE

NORTH  
**Dakota**  
Be Legendary.

Health & Human Services