

2025 SENATE INDUSTRY AND BUSINESS

SB 2200

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Industry and Business Committee Fort Union Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
1/20/2025

A bill relating to the creation of the 988-crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund and the imposition of a 988 access fee; to provide for a legislative management report; to provide an appropriation; to provide a continuing appropriation; and to provide an effective date.

11:00 a.m. Chairman Barta called the meeting to order.

Members present: Chairman Barta, Vice-Chairman Boehm, Senator Klein, Senator Kessel, Senator Enget

Discussion Topics:

- Behavioral health crisis
- Suicide and crisis response coordination
- Administrative cost
- Funding streams within the Department of Health and Human Services
- Crisis Stabilization Fund
- Critical access hospitals and rural areas
- Infrastructure development
- 211 and 911 phone numbers
- Cost savings and investments
- Data management systems
- Care and support follow-up
- Financial burden of suicide
- Office expansion and employee increases
- Technology improvements
- Staff qualifications
- Preventative measures
- National hotline integration
- Geolocation and geo-routing
- Financial practices and efficiency
- Stable and sustainable funding
- Minnesota funding and statistics
- State and local wireless tax and fee burden
- Communication connection concerns

11:01 a.m. Senator Kathy Hogan, District 21, testified in favor and submitted testimony #30127.

11:18 a.m. Jennifer Illich, executive Director at FirstLink, testified in favor and submitted testimony #30002 and #30099.

11:44 a.m. Ashley Lemke, Director of Workforce and Culture at FirstLink, testified in favor and submitted testimony #29988 and #29987.

11:50 a.m. Carlotta McCleary, Executive Director of Mental Health America of ND and the ND Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, testified in favor and submitted testimony #30008.

11:54 a.m. Jake Lestock, Director for State Legislative Affairs in Washington DC, testified in neutral and submitted testimony #30066.

11:59 a.m. Carissa Swenson, Executive Director of BAND, testified in opposition.

12:02 p.m. Shannon Fleischer, associate with the Tax Department, testified in neutral.

Additional written testimony:

#29929, #29810, #29811, #29812, #29813, #29817, #29819, #29820, #29822, #29823, #29825, #29826, #29836, #29854, #29858, #29872, #29880, #29884, #29886, #29892, #29907, #29918, #29923, #29924, #29928, #29934, #29954, #29972, #29983, #29990, #30012, #30014, #30020, #30025, #30034, #30043, #30050, #30068, #30069, #30070, #30076, #30077, #30100, #30102, #30104, #30108.

12:04 p.m. Chairman Barta closed the hearing.

Audrey Oswald, Committee Clerk

Dear Chairman Barta, Vice Chairman Boehm and the Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

Growing up on a farm North Dakota, I know firsthand the struggles many in our community face. Stress, isolation, and financial uncertainty take a heavy toll on mental health. That's why I'm writing to strongly support SB 2200, which will ensure continued and increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline. This funding is vital to keeping wait times down and providing free, lifesaving support to those in crisis.

The demand for 988 services is growing rapidly. FirstLink, which operates the helpline, reports thousands of calls, texts, and chats, with interactions often lasting 20–35 minutes due to the complexity of the issues people face. For farmers and others in rural areas, where mental health resources can be scarce, quick and reliable access to 988 is essential. Without adequate funding, delays in response times could mean the difference between life and death.

Supporting SB 2200 is an investment in the health and well-being of all North Dakotans, including our hardworking farmers. Please help ensure this crucial resource has the funding it needs to meet growing demands and provide timely, effective support to everyone who needs it. Thank you for considering this important bill.

Sincerely,
Alyssa Kahler
North Dakota Farmer

Dear Senate Industry and Business Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2200, which seeks to ensure continued and increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline. This funding is critical to sustaining and expanding the services that provide free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans in crisis.

The need for these services is undeniable. FirstLink, the provider of 988 services in North Dakota, reports rising call, chat, and text volumes, which reflect the growing demand for crisis intervention. Suicide remains a leading cause of death in our state, with over 130 lives lost in 2021—surpassing the national average.

As the Care and Support Coordinator for 988, I lead a dedicated team that provides follow-up calls for individuals who have reached out to our helplines or been referred by community partners. We screen for suicidal ideation and address social determinants of care, connecting individuals with the resources they need to stabilize and recover. Every day, our team directly contributes to saving lives.

However, the complexity of the issues we address has significantly increased, requiring more time and specialized care for each case. Calls and texts often extend beyond regular business hours, highlighting the urgent need for additional full-time staff (FTEs) to ensure adequate support is available around the clock. Without increased funding, we risk being unable to meet this growing demand, potentially leaving vulnerable individuals without the help they need during their darkest moments.

I urge you to support SB 2200 to ensure that FirstLink answering the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline have the resources necessary to continue their lifesaving work and to expand their capacity to meet the increasing needs of our community. Thank you for considering this critical legislation and for prioritizing the well-being of North Dakotans.

Sincerely,

Trinity Weber

Care and Support Coordinator, 988

701-710-4004, trinity.c.weber@gmail.com

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.

My name is Ashley Schmidt, and I am a board member at FirstLink. I know firsthand that this funding is essential to sustaining and expanding the services that provide free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans in crisis. 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.

Supporting SB 2200 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 and for your commitment to strengthening mental health services in our state.

Sincerely,
Ashley Schmidt
Board Member, FirstLink
701-220-9015 or amschmidt@bremer.com

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,

Blaise Kautzman

Board Member, FirstLink

blaise.j.kautzman@gmail.com

(701)260-1011

Subject: Strong Support for SB 2200 – Expanding the 988 Crisis Hotline Program

Dear Chairman Barta, Vice Chairman Boehm, and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Abiola, and I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2200. As an immigrant who has made North Dakota my home, I have witnessed firsthand how vital the 988 crisis hotline program is to our community.

Immigrants like me often face unique challenges, including language barriers, cultural stigma surrounding mental health, and feelings of isolation. These challenges make access to free, confidential, and professional support absolutely essential. The 988 hotline has been a lifeline for many, offering critical assistance during moments of crisis.

The demand for 988 services continues to grow, underscoring the urgent need to expand this program. To meet this increasing demand and effectively support all North Dakotans, including vulnerable groups like immigrants, I urge you to allocate funding for:

1. Adding at least eight full-time employees to ensure timely and effective response.
2. Upgrading infrastructure to enhance the helpline's capacity to address complex needs.

Without this funding, we risk delays that could leave individuals without the support they need during their most challenging moments. Supporting SB 2200 is not just about improving a program—it is an investment in saving lives and fostering a stronger, more inclusive community.

Thank you for your dedication to the well-being of all North Dakotans. I appreciate your consideration of this important legislation and urge you to vote in favor of SB 2200.

Sincerely,
Abiola Adebayo

Dear Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Alana, and as a young adult living in North Dakota, I'm writing to express my strong support for SB 2200. Mental health impacts so many of us, especially young people like me who are working to build our futures while navigating challenges such as stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation.

The 988 crisis hotline has been a game-changer for North Dakotans, providing free, confidential support for anyone in need. For young people, it's a vital resource that makes reaching out for help easier, especially when other options may feel out of reach.

The growing demand for 988 services highlights the urgent need to ensure this program has adequate, consistent, and reliable funding. Expanding the program's resources will allow it to keep up with call volumes and ensure that all North Dakotans, including young adults, can access the help they need without delay.

Without this support, we risk leaving people without someone to turn to during their most difficult moments. Supporting SB 2200 is more than just funding a program—it's an investment in the health and well-being of our communities and the future of North Dakota.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this important legislation. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2200 and help ensure that everyone in our state has access to lifesaving support when they need it most.

Sincerely,
Alana Bozell

Dear Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Brooke, and as a college student living in North Dakota, I'm writing to express my strong support for SB 2200. Mental health is an issue that deeply affects my generation, as many of us balance the demands of school, work, and planning for our futures while navigating challenges like stress, anxiety, and loneliness.

The 988-crisis hotline has been a lifeline for many North Dakotans, including students like me. Its free and confidential services provide a safe and accessible way to seek help, especially for young people who might not know where else to turn.

As the demand for 988 services continues to grow, it's clear that we need to do more to ensure the program can meet the needs of everyone effectively. Reliable, consistent funding is critical to expanding resources, keeping up with call volumes, and ensuring that people—especially vulnerable groups like students—can get the support they need when they need it most.

Without this support, we risk leaving individuals in crisis without help during their most difficult moments. By supporting SB 2200, you're investing in the well-being of our communities and helping to ensure a healthier, stronger future for all North Dakotans.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this important legislation. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2200 and help make lifesaving resources like the 988-crisis hotline accessible to everyone in our state.

Sincerely,
Brooke Narum
Mental Health Advocate

Dear Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

Hello, my name is Kiergon, and I'm currently attending university in North Dakota. I am currently writing to share my strong support for SB 2200. In today's age, the availability of mental health support is something that deeply impacts my generation. For many people my age, the ability to text or chat with the 988 crisis hotline is just as important, if not more, than being able to call in. These options allow those who might feel uncomfortable speaking on the phone, or those in situations where privacy is a concern, to get the support they need. I personally know friends who would never have reached out for help without the text or chat options, and I worry that without proper funding, these critical services could be limited or unavailable.

The demand for 988 services is growing, and we need to make sure that text and chat options are fully supported to meet the needs of all North Dakotans, especially for young people who rely on these resources. Securing adequate and consistent funding for the program will allow the hiring of more staff, improvements in infrastructure, and timely responses for anyone seeking help, no matter how they choose to reach out. Without this funding, we risk leaving some of the most vulnerable people without support in their darkest moments. Supporting SB 2200 is an investment in ensuring that no one has to face a mental health crisis alone, no matter how they choose to connect for help.

Thank you for considering this important legislation. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2200 and help make sure that the 988 crisis hotline can continue to save lives and provide hope to everyone in our state.

Sincerely,

Kiergon Wilkins

Dear Chairman Barta, Vice Chairman Boehm and the Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Ashley Ladbury Hrichena, and I am submitting testimony in support of Senate Bill 2200. I am a North Dakota resident and mental health advocate. As you consider SB 2200, I urge you to prioritize continued and increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

FirstLink is the only designated center in North Dakota that answers 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Calls.

Nationally, 988 is working to create a 24/7 response system for all those in mental health crises with help-seekers being connected to local people that can help connect them to local resources and support. Call Specialists can de-escalate and resolve most crisis calls over the phone. This option helps reduce the burden on health care and emergency services related to mental health response. For those that need a higher level of care, FirstLink can screen and connect the caller to additional in-person resources such as mobile crisis outreach, crisis stabilization, psychiatric hospitalization, or detox. Especially in rural areas like North Dakota, having an easily accessible number is imperative for people to get help before their mental health crisis becomes life-threatening.

For the last several years, the number of help-seekers contacting 988 has increased. As the 988 Lifeline becomes more well-known it is expected call volume will continue to increase. This means FirstLink needs continued funding to increase staff capacity to meet the increased demand for services.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important bill.

Ashley Ladbury Hrichena

Dear Senate Industry and Business Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2200, which seeks to ensure continued and increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline. This funding is essential to sustaining and expanding services that provide free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans in crisis.

As the Coordinator for 988 text and chat services, I oversee a team dedicated to providing immediate and compassionate support through these digital platforms. Many individuals, particularly younger people, feel more comfortable communicating via text or chat rather than over the phone. These platforms often serve as a lifeline for those experiencing suicidal ideation, mental health crises, or other urgent needs. Addressing these complex issues requires specialized care and significant time for each interaction.

The demand for these services continues to grow. Below is a snapshot of the rising need and the time-intensive nature of our work:

- **Phone Interactions Directly Related to Suicide:**

- **2023:** 5,017 calls
- **2024 (to date):** 8,175 calls

- **Texts:**

- **2023:** 459 interactions
- **2024 (to date):** 1,199 interactions

- **Chats:**

- **2023:** 566 interactions
- **2024 (to date):** 1,199 interactions

- **Average Handle Time:**

- Calls: 12 minutes
- Texts: 21 minutes
- Chats: 35 minutes

These numbers illustrate both the increasing complexity of the cases we handle and the growing demand for text and chat services. The extended duration of these interactions further highlights the need for additional resources to ensure timely, effective support for every individual reaching out to us.

Without increased funding, we risk delays in response times and gaps in services, potentially leaving vulnerable individuals without the help they need. Supporting SB 2200 will ensure the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline has the resources to continue its lifesaving work and expand its capacity to meet the needs of our communities.

Your support for this legislation is critical to protecting the well-being of North Dakotans and ensuring no one feels alone during their time of crisis. Thank you for prioritizing mental health and considering this vital bill.

Sincerely,
Rachel Fischer

988 Text and Chat Coordinator
Rachel.pavlicek404@gmail.com

Dear Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

I am Aaliyah Martinez, and I'm writing to express my strong support for SB 2200. As a college student and a loss survivor, I know firsthand the devastating impact of suicide. Losing someone I loved to suicide has made me deeply passionate about ensuring resources like the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline are available for anyone in crisis.

The 988 lifeline offers free, confidential support and is a lifeline for individuals, including young people like me and my peers. For those who may struggle to reach out through traditional means, text and chat options are critical. As demand for these services grows, we must expand the program by hiring more staff, supporting all communication options, and upgrading infrastructure to make sure every call, text, or chat is answered promptly.

Without this funding, we risk leaving vulnerable people without the help they need during their darkest moments. Supporting SB 2200 is a life-saving step toward ensuring no North Dakotan has to face a crisis alone.

Thank you for considering this important legislation. Please vote in favor of SB 2200 to help save lives and support the mental health of our communities.

Sincerely,

Aaliyah Martinez

Aaliyah Martinez
College Student and Loss Survivor

Subject: Support SB 2200 – Strengthening the 988 Crisis Hotline Program

Dear Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

I am Barb Hanson and I'm writing to express my strong support for SB 2200. As a loss survivor, suicide prevention advocate, and faith community nurse, I have seen firsthand the devastating impact that a mental health crisis can have on individuals, families, and entire communities. I have also witnessed the power of resources like the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline in offering hope and saving lives.

For those of us who have experienced loss, the importance of having accessible, compassionate crisis support cannot be overstated. The 988 suicide and crisis lifeline has become a lifeline for so many, providing free and confidential help for individuals in their darkest moments. As someone who works closely with my faith community, I know how vital this resource is, especially for those who may feel isolated or stigmatized when facing mental health challenges.

However, as demand for 988 services grows, we must act to ensure it can meet the needs of all North Dakotans. This includes:

- Funding the addition of more full-time employees to handle increasing call volumes.
- Supporting text and chat options to reach younger individuals and those who may feel more comfortable communicating in these ways.
- Investing in infrastructure upgrades to improve response times and ensure effective support.

Without adequate funding, we risk losing this critical safety net for those in crisis. Supporting SB 2200 is more than a policy decision—it is a commitment to saving lives, reducing stigma, and ensuring that no one has to face a crisis alone.

Thank you for your consideration and for your dedication to the well-being of all North Dakotans. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2200 and help ensure the 988 crisis hotline remains a strong and reliable resource for our state.

With hope and gratitude,

Barb Hanson BSN RN

Faith Community Nurse

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

North Dakota Chapter Board Chair

701-238-7739

barbarahanson2309@gmail.com

Subject: Support SB 2200 – Strengthening the 988 Crisis Hotline Program

Dear Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Tamara, and as a passionate advocate for mental health, I'm writing to express my strong support for SB 2200. Mental health challenges impact people of all ages and backgrounds in North Dakota, and having accessible, reliable resources like the 988 crisis hotline is absolutely essential to saving lives and fostering community well-being.

The 988 hotline has already proven to be a transformative resource, offering free, confidential, and compassionate support to individuals in crisis. It has reduced barriers to seeking help, providing a crucial safety net for people who may not have access to other mental health services.

However, the demand for 988 services is growing, and it's imperative that we act now to expand the program's capacity. By securing adequate and consistent funding, we can ensure:

- The hiring of additional full-time employees to handle increasing call volumes.
- Infrastructure improvements to provide timely and effective responses to all North Dakotans, including those in rural and underserved areas.

Without this support, we risk leaving individuals in crisis without the help they need, potentially leading to tragic outcomes. As a mental health advocate, I see the difference these services make every day. Supporting SB 2200 is more than a policy decision—it's a commitment to saving lives and creating a healthier, more resilient North Dakota.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering this critical legislation. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2200 and help ensure that everyone in our state has access to the support they need during their most vulnerable moments.

Sincerely,
Tamara Kelly
Mental Health Advocate

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.

My name Sarah Aaberg, and I am a board member at FirstLink. I know firsthand that this funding is essential to sustaining and expanding the services that provide free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans in crisis. 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.

Supporting SB 2200 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 and for your commitment to strengthening mental health services in our state.

Sincerely,



Sarah Aaberg
Board Member, FirstLink
sarahannaaberg@gmail.com
701-235-8000

Dear Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is John Illich, and I am writing to you **not just as a concerned North Dakota resident but as a father who worries every day about the pressures our kids face.** Suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals aged 10 to 24 in our state—a heartbreaking and preventable tragedy.

From 2004 to 2021, the youth suicide rate in North Dakota rose by over 46%, and from 2018 to 2021, there was a 33% increase in suicide ideation and attempts among young people. **As a parent, those numbers keep me awake at night. Every one of them represents a life lost or a child struggling in silence.**

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline has been a beacon of hope, offering free, confidential support through calls, chats, and texts to those in crisis. **These multiple communication options ensure that individuals—especially young people—can reach out in the way they feel most comfortable.** But as the need for these services grows, we must ensure the lifeline is funded to operate 24/7 and meet the increasing demand. **Without this critical support, our kids could be left without anyone to turn to during their darkest moments.**

Supporting SB 2200 isn't just about policy—it's about saving lives and giving parents like me hope that our children will always have help when they need it most. I urge you to vote in favor of this bill and help ensure every young person in North Dakota has a lifeline to hold on to—whether it's through a call, chat, or text.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Together, we can protect our kids and build a safer, stronger future for all families in our state.

Sincerely,

John Illich

John Illich
Concerned parent

I am writing to strongly urge you to vote **yes** on SB 2200.

As a business owner, a mother of four, and a grandmother of seven, I have seen firsthand the struggles many individuals and families face when dealing with mental health challenges and substance use issues. I have witnessed people in our community battling suicidal thoughts and, tragically, some who have lost that battle. These experiences are heartbreaking and underscore the critical need for accessible mental health support in our state.

Organizations like **FirstLink**, which answers the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** play an essential role in providing timely and life-saving assistance to those in crisis. These services not only connect people with the help they desperately need but also strengthen the fabric of our communities by offering hope and resources in the most challenging times.

Supporting SB 2200 is an investment in the well-being of our state. By funding and expanding these vital services, we can ensure that no one has to face their darkest moments alone. **Mental health challenges and substance use struggles impact all of us—our families, our businesses, and our communities—and it is our shared responsibility to respond with compassion and action.**

I urge you to vote yes on SB 2200. Let us take this step together to support and save lives in North Dakota.

Sincerely,
Edith Lade

Edith Lade

Dear Chair Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

As a passionate mental health advocate, I strongly urge your support for SB 2200 to ensure the continued and increased funding of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

This vital service provides free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans. FirstLink's reports of increasing call, chat, and text volumes underscore a growing and urgent need. Suicide remains a leading cause of death in our state, with over 130 lives lost in 2021—a sobering statistic that exceeds the national average.

Sustained funding is not just a necessity; it is a lifeline for addressing mental health crises, particularly in rural areas where access to resources is often limited. Ensuring these services remain available and adequately funded sends a clear message: no one in crisis must face their struggles alone.

Thank you for your consideration and for supporting this critical initiative.

Sincerely,
Aleyna Leibfried

Dear Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Krista Frenzel, and I am writing to you not just as a mental health advocate but as a **deeply concerned parent**. The rising rates of youth suicide weigh heavily on my heart, as I know they do for countless parents across North Dakota. Our children face immense pressures and challenges, and too often, they don't know where to turn for help.

In North Dakota, suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals aged 10 to 24. However, this is a preventable tragedy.

[The Jason Foundation, Inc.](#)

Between 2004 and 2021, the suicide rate in this **age group increased by 46.2%**, rising from 11.9 to 17.5 per 100,000 population. Alarming, there was a 33% increase in suicide ideation and attempts among youth between 2018 and 2021 alone.

[NORC at the University of Chicago](#)

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline has already made a life-saving difference by providing free, confidential, and compassionate support to those in crisis. But as the demand for these services grows, we must do more to ensure they remain accessible and equipped to handle every call, chat, and text—especially those from young people on the brink of despair.

This is why I strongly support SB 2200. By securing the necessary funding, we can guarantee that the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline operates 24/7 with sufficient resources to provide immediate, effective assistance to our most vulnerable youth. **Without this support, we risk leaving children and teenagers without a critical lifeline, and as a parent, that is simply unacceptable.**

Our children's lives are at stake. Supporting SB 2200 is not just a legislative action—it's a moral responsibility. **I urge you to vote in favor of this bill and ensure that every young person in our state has somewhere to turn when they feel there is no hope left.**

Thank you for your time and for considering this urgent matter. Together, we can protect the lives of our children and build a safer, healthier future for all families in North Dakota.

Sincerely,

Krista Frenzel

Dear Chairman Barta, and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

As a former Executive Director with 15 years of firsthand experience in overseeing crisis intervention services, I am writing to strongly urge your support for HB 1012. This bill is vital to securing the continued and increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline. Having been deeply involved in the day-to-day operations of these services, I have witnessed the growing demand for support and the lifesaving impact these helplines have on our community.

FirstLink, which operates both the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline and the 211 information and referral helpline, has seen consistent increases in call, chat, and text volumes. Beyond the sheer number of interactions, the nature of these engagements has become increasingly complex, requiring more time and specialized attention from trained staff. On many occasions, these calls involve individuals who are already in the process of contemplating or attempting suicide, making immediate response and low answer times absolutely critical. Delays in response can mean the difference between life and death. To meet these challenges, we urgently need additional Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) employees to ensure timely and effective support.

Over my tenure, I observed a significant increase not only in the volume of calls but also in the duration of each interaction. People in crisis often need extended conversations to feel heard, understood, and guided toward safety.

These longer interactions, while essential, also highlight the pressing need for expanded resources and staffing to maintain the level of service our community relies on. Without adequate funding, we risk overburdening existing staff and jeopardizing the quality and timeliness of the support provided.

North Dakota continues to face sobering mental health challenges. Suicide remains a leading cause of death in our state, with more than 130 lives lost in 2021 alone—a figure that tragically exceeds the national average. This reality underscores the importance of bolstering mental health resources, particularly in rural areas where access to care is often limited. By fully funding the 988 and 211 helplines, we affirm our commitment to ensuring that no one in crisis feels abandoned or without hope.

I have seen firsthand how these lifelines save lives, provide comfort, and connect individuals to critical resources. I urge you to support HB 1012 and ensure the funding necessary to sustain and expand these essential services. The people of North Dakota are counting on us to prioritize mental health and crisis intervention.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Cindy Miller

Former Executive Director, FirstLink

15-Year Advocate for Crisis Intervention Services

Dear Chair Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

I am writing to strongly urge you to vote yes on SB 2200.

As a Vietnam veteran, a rural North Dakota farmer, a father of four, and a grandfather of seven, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating toll that mental health struggles and substance use challenges can take on individuals, families, and entire communities. I have seen people in my community grapple with suicidal thoughts, and tragically, I have known those who lost their battle with despair.

The need for accessible, timely support for those in crisis cannot be overstated. This is why our state must continue to support and strengthen resources like **FirstLink**, which answers the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** and the **211 Information and Referral Helpline**. These critical services provide a lifeline to individuals in their darkest moments and help connect them to the support they need.

Please, as someone who cares deeply about our state and the people in it, I urge you to support SB 2200. Together, we can make a meaningful difference for those who are struggling and bring hope to those who need it most.

Sincerely,

Daniel Lade

Dear Chairman Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

As a suicide loss survivor, and resident of rural North Dakota, I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2200, which seeks to ensure continued and increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Rural areas in our state face unique challenges, with suicide rates in these regions being consistently higher than in urban areas.

The 988 Lifeline provides free, confidential support to individuals in crisis, serving as a critical resource for veterans and rural residents who may feel isolated or lack access to mental health services. Ensuring sustained funding for this lifeline is essential to address the mental health needs of our communities effectively.

By supporting SB 2200, you are taking a vital step toward reducing suicide rates and providing necessary support to those who have served our country and reside in rural areas.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to the well-being of all North Dakotans.

Sincerely,

Monte Rodacker

Dear Chair Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

As a former member of the United States Army, I have witnessed the unique mental health challenges faced by service members and veterans. In 2020, North Dakota reported 23 veteran suicides, resulting in a rate of 41.8 per 100,000—significantly higher than the national veteran suicide rate of 31.7 per 100,000.

These statistics highlight the urgent need for robust mental health support systems. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline offers free, confidential assistance to all North Dakotans, including veterans and service members. FirstLink's increasing call, chat, and text volumes indicate a growing reliance on these services. With suicide remaining a leading cause of death in our state, claiming over 130 lives in 2021, ensuring sustained and increased funding for the 988 Lifeline is imperative.

By supporting SB 2200, we can affirm our commitment to those who have served and to all residents in crisis, ensuring they do not face their struggles alone.

Thank you for considering this critical initiative.

Respectfully
Jonathan Ross
US Army Veteran

Dear Senate Industry and Business Committee,

I am writing to express strong support for SB 2200, which seeks to ensure continued and increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline. This funding is essential to sustaining and expanding services that provide free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans experiencing mental health crises.

Discussions with the team at FirstLink reveal the growing demand for 988 services and the significant resources required to meet these needs effectively. The following data demonstrates both the increasing usage of the helpline and the time-intensive nature of the interactions:

- **Phone Interactions Directly Related to Suicide:**

- 2023: 5,017 calls
- 2024 (to date): 8,175 calls

- **Texts:**

- 2023: 459 interactions
- 2024 (to date): 1,199 interactions

- **Chats:**

- 2023: 566 interactions
- 2024 (to date): 1,199 interactions

- **Average Handle Time:**

- Calls: 12 minutes
- Texts: 21 minutes
- **Chats: 35 minutes**

These figures reflect both the growing complexity of the cases being addressed and the rising preference for text and chat services. Ensuring adequate resources for these longer, more interactions is essential for providing timely and effective support.

This legislation represents a vital investment in the mental health and well-being of our communities. **It sends a clear message that no one should have to face a mental health crisis alone.**

Thank you for prioritizing mental health and for your consideration of this critical bill.

Sincerely,

Jenna Johnson

Dear Chairman Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

As someone who has faced addiction struggles and personally understands the importance of accessible mental health resources, I strongly urge your support for SB 2200 to ensure the continued and increased funding of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

When I was at my lowest, I know how isolating and hopeless it can feel. Services like the 988 Lifeline are a beacon of hope for people who believe they have nowhere to turn. The free, confidential, and lifesaving support it provides is vital for countless North Dakotans, especially those in rural areas where access to mental health resources is scarce.

The rising call, chat, and text volumes reported by FirstLink are evidence of a growing crisis in our state. Suicide continues to take too many lives—over 130 in 2021 alone—surpassing the national average.

[Health and Human Services North Dakota](#)

Moreover, North Dakota faces significant challenges related to substance use disorders. In 2021, approximately 20.5% of adults in the state experienced any mental illness, and 8.9% had a substance use disorder.

[Health and Human Services North Dakota](#)

Sustained funding for the 988 Lifeline is not just a financial commitment; it is a promise that no one has to face their darkest moments alone. It is an investment in hope and healing for people who are struggling and for the communities who support them.

Thank you for your time and for considering this critical initiative. Your support could mean the difference between life and death for someone in crisis.

Sincerely,

Terry Lausch

Dear Chairman Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

As a passionate and committed mental health advocate, I strongly urge your support for SB 2200 to ensure the continued and increased funding of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, a critical lifeline for those in crisis.

The reality is stark: people in our communities are dying by suicide, and without adequate funding for services like the 988 Lifeline, many may feel there is no one willing or able to help. This service has the potential to transform lives by providing a beacon of hope for those in need. By investing in the 988 Lifeline, we can empower individuals to seek help, foster a culture of support, and build stronger, more resilient communities. **Sustained funding is not just a necessity; it is essential for addressing mental health crises and preventing further tragedies—creating a safety net of support for all.**

I firmly believe that together, we can create a community that prioritizes mental health, encourages open conversations, and provides a refuge for those struggling.

By ensuring the 988 Lifeline remains available and adequately funded, we send a resounding message of hope and compassion: no one in crisis has to face their struggles alone, and help is always within reach.

I urge you to support SB 2200. Investing in this service is an investment in saving lives and strengthening our communities. Thank you for your consideration and for supporting this critical initiative.

Sincerely,
Danae Coleman

Mental Health Advocate

Dear Chair Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

I strongly urge your support for SB 2200 to ensure the continued and increased funding of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

This vital service provides free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans. First Link's reports of increasing call, chat, and text volumes underscore a growing and urgent need, a 59 % increase in calls from 2023-2024 which means more people are reaching out for help. First Link call professionals provide help and hope.

Sustained funding is not just a necessity; it is a lifeline for addressing mental health crises, particularly in rural areas where access to resources is often limited.

Thank you for your consideration and for supporting this critical initiative.

Sincerely,

Karen Nitzkowski

4711 105th St N

Harwood, ND 58042

Cell: 701-371-9644

01/19/2025



FROM THE DESK OF ADAM MARTIN FOUNDER AND CEO OF F5 PROJECT

Dear Chair Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

As the Founder and CEO of F5, I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 2200 (SB 2200). My name is Adam Martin, and this legislation is crucial for ensuring the safety and well-being of North Dakotans, especially those in crisis.

Many individuals transitioning from incarceration face significant challenges, including mental health struggles, stigma, and limited access to resources. These barriers can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair, making access to crisis support systems like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline essential. SB 2200 addresses this need by securing funding to maintain and expand this vital service, ensuring it remains accessible to everyone, including those reintegrating into our communities after serving time.

In North Dakota, approximately 1 in 6 adults has a felony conviction, highlighting the scale of the population impacted by these challenges. Additionally, individuals with criminal records face unemployment rates five times higher than the general population, exacerbating mental health struggles and increasing the risk of crises. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline provides immediate support to individuals in distress, particularly in rural areas where access to mental health resources is limited.

For people with felony convictions, this lifeline can be a critical tool for navigating crises, connecting to resources, and building stability during their reentry journey. By investing in this helpline, we are investing in second chances and creating safer, healthier communities.

This legislation transcends politics; it is about ensuring that every North Dakotan, regardless of their past, has access to the support they need to move forward and thrive. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2200 to help prevent unnecessary tragedies and support individuals on their path to rehabilitation and reintegration. Thank you for your consideration. I am available to provide additional information or discuss my support further.

Adam Martin, Founder and CEO of F5 Project



701.210.2491



info@f5project.org



www.f5project.org

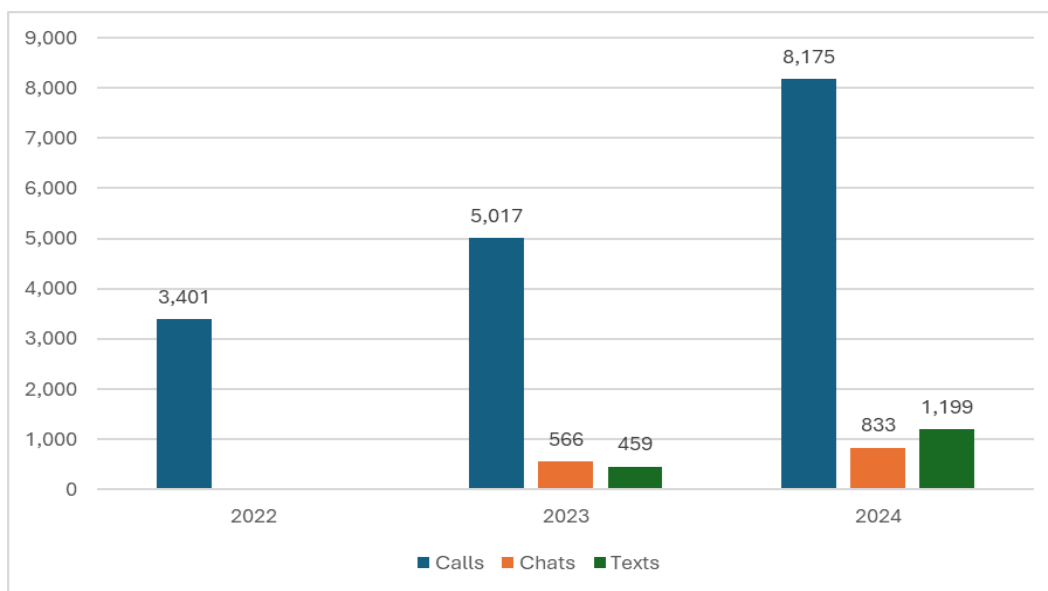


1122 1st Ave N
Fargo, ND 58102

Dear Chairman Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

I strongly urge your support for SB 2200 to ensure the continued and increased funding of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

This essential service provides free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans. These services are proven to be effective, as FirstLink handled 10,207 calls, chats, and texts on the 988 Lifeline in 2024 and only requested assistance from local emergency dispatch 118 times, of which 58 of those connections to dispatch were voluntary/at request of the help-seeker. **The need for compassionate support to North Dakotans reaching the 988 Lifeline is evident in the increasing volume of calls, chats, and texts each year (see chart below.)**



By supporting SB 2200, you are making a commitment to saving lives and strengthening our communities. Your leadership is vital in ensuring that no one in crisis feels alone and that help is always available.

Thank you for your consideration and for your dedication to the well-being of North Dakotans.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Brown

Subject: Strong Support for SB2200

My name is Elizabeth Medd. I'm a mother of two, wife, architect and youth mental health advocate.

I am submitting this testimony in favor of the 988 suicide prevention and crisis lifeline number as listed in Senate Bill 2200. This country, and specifically the state of North Dakota, is experiencing a mental health crisis of epidemic proportions. Support is necessary from early prevention education through crisis support, the latter of which is currently provided by the 988 lifeline number.

This is personally important to me as our family has endured the devastating loss of a loved one to suicide. On February 1, 2021, my fifteen-year-old son took his own life. While there was a 1800 number in existence at the time, it is our belief that keeping a more accessible number and resource, found in the 988 support system, is necessary to save lives. The 988 crisis line is easy to recognize, memorize and access from any device and this allows it to be more effective for someone experiencing a crisis.

As part of being a youth mental health advocate, I have completed many of the trainings necessary for the lifeline workers and can attest to the empathy, compassion and caring provided by those answering calls and the effectiveness of having such individuals available through the 988 number.

In keeping such a resource and providing funding and legislation for it for years to come, will put North Dakota in the right position in the fight to end the epidemic of suicide in our state by allotting for the necessary and valuable resource that is the 988 suicide prevention and crisis lifeline number.

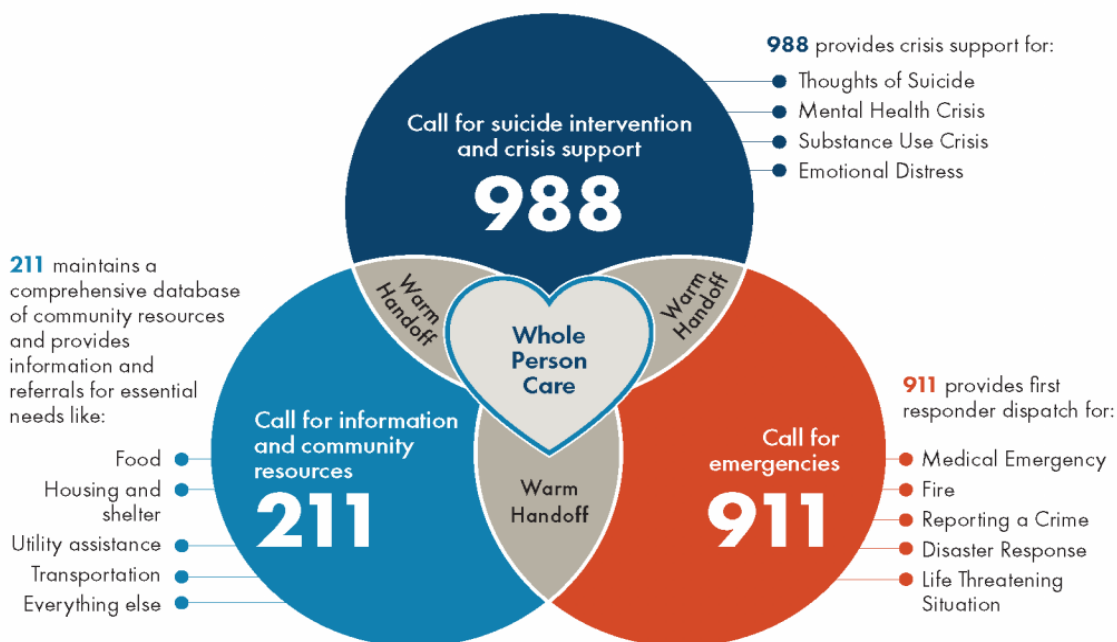
Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Elizabeth Medd

Suicide Loss Survivor

Help is **3** Numbers Away



988 | SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE

NORTH
Dakota
Be Legendary.

Health & Human Services

Dear Chairman Barta, Vice Chairman Boehm and the Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Ashley Lemke and I am the Director of Workforce and Culture at FirstLink in Fargo, North Dakota. FirstLink answers the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for all of North Dakota and 17 counties in Minnesota. I am submitting testimony in support of the bill creating the 988 crisis hotline program, the stabilization fund, and the 988 access fee.

FirstLink is a critical part of the mental health crisis response system. The 988 Lifeline provides immediate, confidential support for individuals in crisis, helping to prevent suicide and connecting people to the appropriate services. As demand for this service continues to rise, it is essential that we have a stable and sustainable funding source to maintain and expand our capacity to meet the needs of our communities.

The 988 access fee proposed in this bill will ensure that FirstLink and other crisis centers can continue providing these vital services. This funding will support necessary staffing, improve service delivery, and allow us to invest in resources to better address mental health crises and reduce the burden on law enforcement and emergency services.

This bill is a critical step toward strengthening our crisis response infrastructure. By establishing the 988 crisis stabilization fund, we can ensure timely interventions and improved outcomes for those in crisis, ultimately saving lives and improving community health.

I strongly support this bill and urge its passage to help sustain and enhance the 988 hotline program. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ashley Lemke
Director of Workforce and Culture
FirstLink
Fargo, ND



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 2200

Mark Jorritsma, Executive Director
North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action
January 20, 2025

Dear Chairman Barta and honorable members of the Senate Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Mark Jorritsma and I am the Executive Director of North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action. I am testifying on behalf of our organization in support of Senate Bill 2200 and respectfully request that you render a "DO PASS" on this bill.

SB 2200 would support funding for a 988 crisis hotline focused on suicide prevention and responding to mental health crises. Our organization recognizes that mental health and suicide prevention through mechanisms like a hotline are important, however, we would assert that this hotline is not simply just important, it is *critical* for North Dakota.

Using the most recent official data available, North Dakota is the state with the 5th highest suicide rate in the nation¹ The story is just as bad when we look at alcohol abuse. North Dakota is current ranked #1 in DUI rates, and it has the 5th highest alcohol consumption per capita in the country.² We have significant issues and solving them is complex and generally takes long-term solutions. That is great, but what if the situation is more urgent?

If a drunk driver kills a person, has a dangerous mental break with reality, attempts suicide, or is trying to deal with a similar life-threatening crisis, no long-term solution will help them in that moment. They need immediate urgent intervention, and that is what the 988 hotline can provide.

Speaking personally, my wife's and my own extended families and friends have had to deal with individuals who have committed suicide, have life-crippling mental health issues, and fight daily with substance abuse problems. I doubt that our family is a dramatic outlier in this respect. This is not an abstract problem, it's real and needs to be addressed.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/suicide-mortality/suicide.htm>

² <https://quotewizard.com/news/americas-booziest-states>

There is ample evidence that crisis hotlines can greatly improve outcomes addressing these issues in urgent situations, and they can also serve as an entry point to more long-lasting care. For these reasons, North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action requests that you render a “DO PASS” on Senate Bill 2200. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, and feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Mark Jorritsma
Executive Director
North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action

Dear Chairman Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Jennifer Illich, and I am the Executive Director of FirstLink. I am here today to express my strong support for SB 2200. FirstLink proudly answers the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, providing 24/7/365 crisis intervention services to individuals across North Dakota. Our mission is to offer immediate support and connect those in crisis with the essential resources they need.

FirstLink, like 988 centers nationwide, serves as a cost-effective solution for behavioral health support. We save lives from suicide every day and ensure individuals receive the assistance necessary to stay alive. While it is impossible to place a monetary value on a life saved, research suggests that the economic cost of a single suicide death in the United States is approximately \$1.5 million, factoring in medical expenses, lost productivity, and the profound impact on families and communities. In 2024, 112 North Dakotans called 988 during a suicide attempt and survived, resulting in an estimated cost savings of \$168 million.

We are proud to collaborate with 911 centers to alleviate the growing demands on first responders. Through our intervention, 14,190 crises were successfully de-escalated without requiring first responder involvement. Given that the average cost of an ambulance response is \$1,500, this resulted in a total estimated cost savings of \$21.3 million. This figure does not even include the additional healthcare expenses that would have incurred.

Research consistently highlights that integrated partnerships between 988 and 911 can significantly reduce the strain on emergency services while providing more tailored support to help-seekers in crisis.

Beyond immediate crisis intervention, FirstLink partners with healthcare providers and internal referrals to offer follow-up services through our Care and Support Program. This program assists individuals admitted due to suicide attempts and overdoses, helping them maintain stability and reducing hospital readmissions, ultimately saving thousands of dollars for our state. Studies show that individuals who receive consistent follow-up support are significantly less likely to experience recurrent crises. Our follow-up services include regular check-ins, resource coordination, and emotional support to ensure individuals remain engaged with appropriate care services.

Furthermore, research indicates that follow-up interventions are highly cost-effective. For every dollar invested in follow-up calls to at-risk individuals, there is an estimated return of between \$1.76 and \$2.43 (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 2021). These programs not only prevent suicide attempts but also reduce the financial burden associated with emergency department visits and inpatient treatment.

FirstLink's call, chat, and text volume has increased substantially over the past year, and the severity of call interactions has also risen, requiring longer engagement times with individuals in crisis. To sustain our life-saving work, FirstLink requires:

- Hiring 8 full-time employees (FTEs) in 2025
- Expansion of office space to accommodate our growing crisis response team.
- Investment in technology improvements to enhance communication and cybersecurity measures.

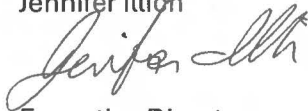
- Coverage of operational costs for vital computer programs and communication platforms to support the expanded team and maintain service quality.

I urge you to vote yes on SB 2200 to ensure continued, secure, and adequate funding and expansion of these critical services. Your support is vital to sustaining and enhancing FirstLink's ability to provide life-saving assistance to North Dakotans in crisis.

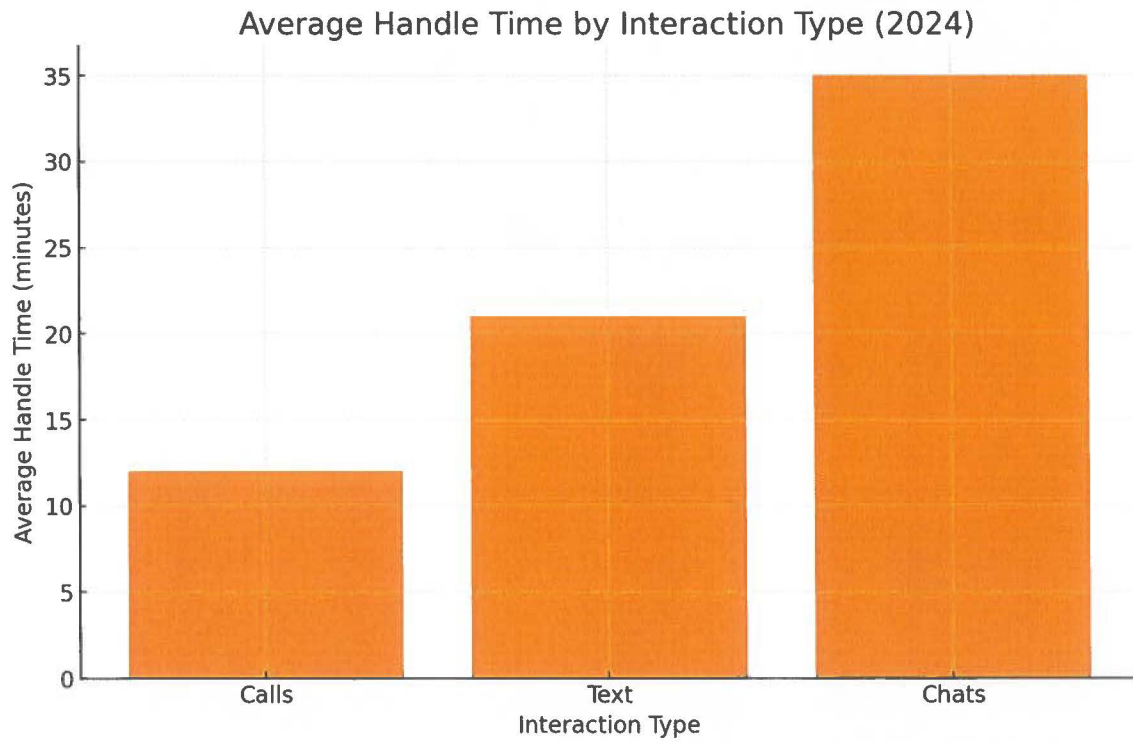
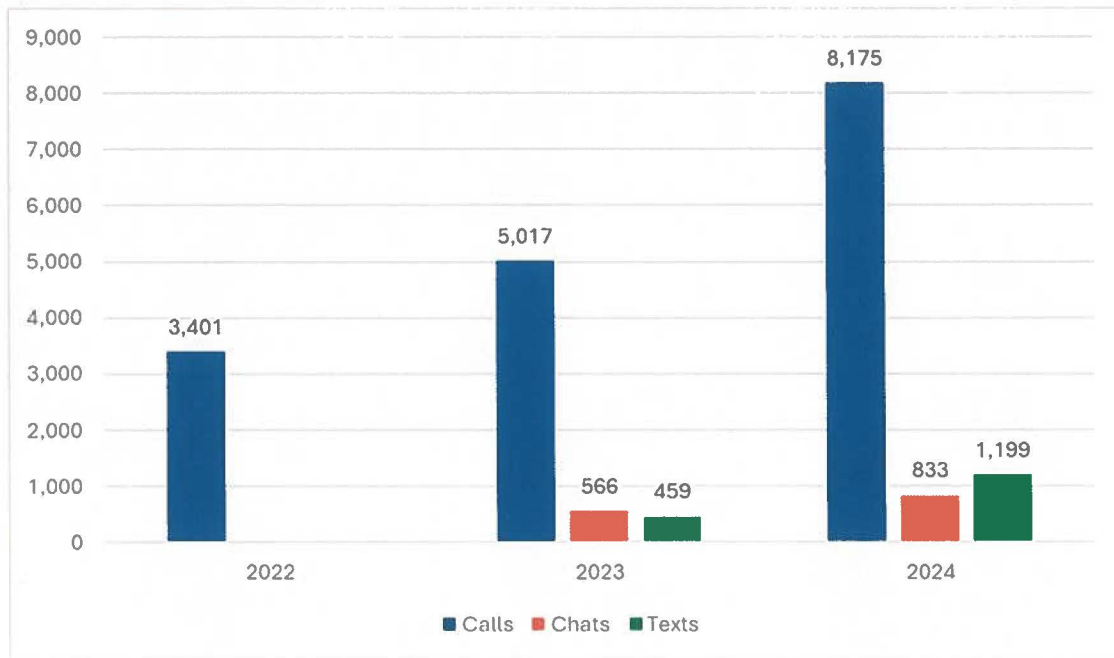
Thank you for your time and consideration.

I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

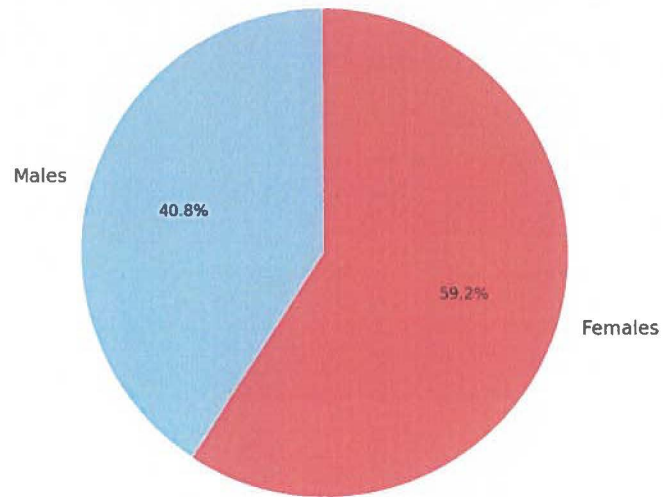
Jennifer Illich

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

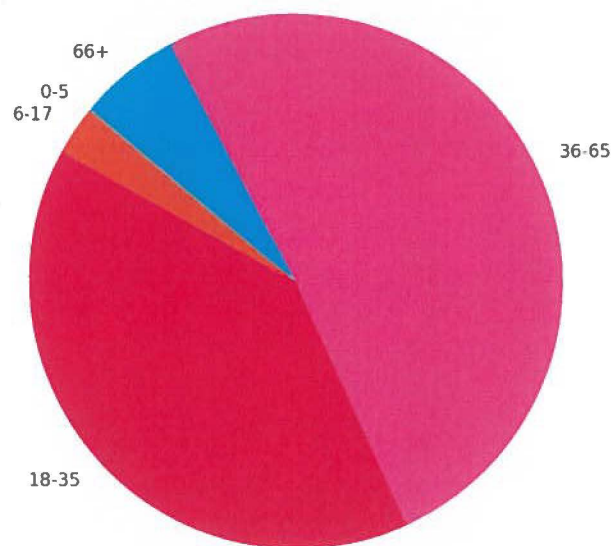
Executive Director
FirstLink



Percentage of Males and Females in 2024



Age Distribution (2024)





Consumer & Family Network
Mental Health America of ND
Youth Move Beyond
The Arc of Bismarck

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
Protection & Advocacy Project
ND Association of Community Providers
Fraser, Ltd. Individual Consumers & Families

**Senate Industry and Business Committee
SB 2200 Testimony
January 20, 2025
Senator Jeff Barta, Chair**

Good morning, Chairman Barta and Members of the Senate Industry and Business Committee.

I am Carlotta McCleary, Executive Director of Mental Health America of North Dakota and Executive Director of the North Dakota Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health.

Today I speak on behalf of the Mental Health Advocacy Network (MHAN). MHAN advocates for a consumer/family driven mental health system of care that provides an array of service choices that are timely, responsive and effective. Our vision is for every North Dakotan to have access to the right service—whether it be preventative, treatment, or recovery; at the right time—when the service is needed; and at the right place—as near his or her home as possible.

MHAN is testifying in support of SB 2200, which would expand funding opportunities for Firstlink and North Dakota's 988 program. The best practice model for a behavioral health crisis response system is to: have someone to call (988), someone to respond (mobile crisis teams), and a place to go (crisis stabilization units for adults and crisis stabilization units for children). You must have all three legs of this stool for the system to work. Today we are specifically talking about someone to call. 988 was officially designated as the new behavioral health crisis hotline with the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act. 988 is an easy-to-remember number that is operational 24/7 for anyone experiencing suicidal ideation, a mental health crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress.

FirstLink has also provided data regarding their call logs. At around 2013, FirstLink reported that it received 1,501 calls directly related to suicide. In recent years, FirstLink's 988 services handles between 14,000 to 15,000 contacts, with a substantial increase coming in texts and chats. More people are becoming aware of hotlines to seek help, but more people are also finding themselves in crisis. MHAN is also attempting to increase awareness of 988 and bolster North Dakota's ability to respond to crisis situations for more people, including children and families. As North Dakota continues to build its crisis response system, including for children and families, the state will continue to see increased utilization of 988. The crisis response system is a three-legged stool and if one of those legs begins to falter, it risks the stability of the entire stool. FirstLink needs to be able to have enough manpower to respond to calls, texts, and chats to help North Dakotans receive timely services—services that deescalate situations, decrease the use of emergency rooms, and saves lives. That is a service that is worth investing in.

This concludes my testimony, and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Carlotta McCleary
Mental Health Advocacy Network, Spokesperson
E-Mail: cmccleary@ndffcmh.com
Phone: (701) 222-3310

Dear Chair Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

I strongly support Senate Bill 2200 (SB 2200). As a community member, I urge you to vote in favor of this critical legislation to protect our communities.

Gun violence is a public health crisis, taking over 40,000 lives annually nationwide. **In North Dakota, an average of 90% of gun deaths are suicides, with 73 people losing their lives to firearm suicide each year.** These statistics underscore the urgent need for action. SB 2200 takes an important step by securing funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Helpline, providing vital support for individuals in distress, particularly in rural areas with limited mental health services.

To prevent suicide in North Dakota, we need safe storage laws to reduce access to unsecured firearms, background checks to ensure responsible ownership, and 24/7 crisis support to provide immediate assistance to those in need.

SB 2200 is about safeguarding our children, families, and communities, not politics.

Please support SB 2200 to create a safer future for all North Dakotans.

Thank you for your consideration. I'd be happy to provide additional information or discuss my support further.

Sincerely,

Jackie Beller – Fargo Resident and First Link Supporter

Chairman Barta and committee members,

My name is Emma Quinn, and I am a constituent of district 46. I am writing in support of SB 2200. I am an individual that lives with a lifelong serious mental illness, and I have worked in the behavioral health field for the past 6 years.

988 is a valuable resource that both clients of behavioral health services as well as behavioral health professionals depend on. Funding to continue 988 services is something we must do as a state. Every North Dakotan deserves access to crisis behavioral health services.

Behavioral health challenges do not always show up Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm. In fact, they often occur after hours. 988 is a 24 hour crisis line that is one of the very few 24/7 behavioral health services in our state.

As a behavioral health professional, I am unable to serve clients 24/7 which means I need to make sure they have appropriate resources for when I am unable to help. 988 is a vital resource that I give out to clients for when they are struggling, and I am unavailable.

By providing a funding source for 988 we ensure that our state will not be without crisis services in North Dakota.

Thank you,

Emma Quinn

Subject: Strong Support for SB 2200 – 988 crisis hotline

We are writing to express our strong support for SB 2200 and urge you to vote in its favor. **Our names are Karla and Ron Forde**, and we are the **founders of *Enough with the Stigma***. Our foundation was established in memory of our 26-year-old son, Connor, who tragically took his life in December 2022.

Our mission is to educate others about the harmful stigma surrounding mental health and **to encourage young adults to embrace open, honest conversations about their emotions and struggles**. We are committed to challenging the outdated notion that one must remain tough and silent in the face of adversity. Instead, we aim to empower individuals to seek help and know they are not alone.

Having experienced the devastating impact of suicide firsthand, we know how vital it is for individuals in crisis to have immediate access to support. The availability of a 24/7 crisis line, such as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the 211 Information and Referral Helpline, is absolutely critical. These services provide hope and assistance to those who need it most, often serving as the difference between despair and recovery.

We urge you to support SB 2200 to ensure these lifesaving resources are properly funded and staffed to meet the needs of our communities. Together, we can work to break the stigma, save lives, and build a future where no one feels alone in their darkest moments.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,
Karla and Ron Forde
Founders, *Enough with the Stigma*

7330 Burnt Creek Loop
Bismarck, ND 58503
January 19, 2025

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2200. My name is Janeen Norland and I am a North Dakota field advocate for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. More importantly, I am a mother whose son died by suicide 16 years ago. This life changing event prompted my work in suicide prevention so no other family has to endure the pain of having a child die.

After many years of advocating for a 3-digit crisis hotline in place of a 10-digit number, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline became a reality. My only regret is that it wasn't available for my son. In his mental health crisis, he made several calls to people that went unanswered as it was late at night. I can't help but think perhaps his life could have been saved had 988 been available.

I share this with you to highlight the importance of providing immediate assistance to individuals in crisis. First Link and similar programs provide this crucial role in our community. In 2023 alone, FirstLink answered 14,284 calls directly related to suicide. The need for intervention continues to grow as witnessed by a 61% increase in calls to 988 in North Dakota between 2022 and 2023.

Stable funding for 988 services through FirstLink and all of the partners is critical for saving the lives of our North Dakota citizens. I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2200 to secure the future of 988 services. It's a very small price to pay.

Sincerely,

Janeen Norland

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2145. My name is Linda Sand, and I am a concerned citizen. 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,

Linda Lee Sand

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.

My name is Kathryn Norby, and I am a board member at FirstLink. I know firsthand that this funding is essential to sustaining and expanding the services that provide free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans in crisis. 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.

Supporting SB 2200 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 and for your commitment to strengthening mental health services in our state.

Sincerely,
Kathryn Norby
Board Member, FirstLink
Vice President, Operations, Sanford Health
Kathryn.Norby@sanfordhealth.org
406-579-9853 (cell)

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Bill SB 2200. My name is Sara Dukart and I am a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner and a suicide loss survivor. 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. I have had patients that because of 988 they did not act on their suicidal ideations and were provided with the care they needed in the moment of their crisis. Knowing that someone will answer their call when they are struggling, is all that is needed sometimes for someone to not act on their suicidal thoughts.

SB 2200 is vital to ensuring that our 988 services have the necessary funding and support to service people across the state of North Dakota who may be struggling and in crisis. This is crucial in our state due to limited mental health care providers, long wait list to see a provider and full emergency room. In 2023 alone, FirstLink answered 14,284 calls directly related to suicide, and between 2022 and 2023 they saw a 61% increase in calls to 988 in North Dakota. The work of FirstLink and all of the partners that make 988 possible is critical to saving lives in our communities.

I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2200 to secure the future of our 988 services.

Sincerely,

Sara Dukart

Doctorate of Nursing Practice, Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner
sara.dukart@sanfordhealth.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

North Dakota Board Member



**Testimony of
JAKE LESTOCK
CTIA**

North Dakota Senate Bill 2200

**Before the
North Dakota Senate Industry & Business Committee**

January 20, 2025

Chairman Barta, Vice Chairman Boehm, and members of the committee, on behalf of CTIA®, the trade association for the wireless communications industry, I submit this testimony to address concerns with North Dakota Senate Bill 2200. CTIA and its member companies support the designation of 988 as the three-digit dial for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. CTIA member companies have implemented network changes to ensure Americans can dial 988 when in crisis right now.

CTIA and its members also understand the importance of a workable state 988 funding framework. From the outset, it is important to note that most states implementing 988 are utilizing general fund appropriations and federal contributions for funding as opposed to enacting a new tax on their residents. In the past few years, over 30 states have proposed to either appropriate general fund revenue and utilize federal funds or study the issue further. As shown in the attached map, only nine states



have chosen to fund these services through a new tax on telephone bills.¹

It is also important to note that the Office of Management and Budget projected North Dakota's general fund is expected to end the 2023-25 biennium with a nearly \$713 million surplus.² A new tax on North Dakotans is puzzling considering this recent windfall of state funds. This is especially concerning in light of how comparatively high the state's wireless taxes currently stand. North Dakota has the 13th highest state and local tax and fee burden in the country.³ Wireless consumers in your state already pay nearly 15.8 percent of their cell phone bills in state and local taxes and fees and nearly 29% in federal and state taxes, and these types of fees are highly regressive.

Any 988 tax should be kept as low as possible and justified by data showing exactly what the tax will fund. These types of taxes are highly regressive. Wireless phones are the gateway to the internet for many North Dakotans, so overburdening these consumers with more taxes and fees may detrimentally affect their continued connectivity. Limiting the scope of the 988 tax and keeping it as low as possible will help the bottom line for so many consumers. Together with North Dakota's current

¹ See Figure 1 on Pg. 4.

² Steurer, M., & Achterling, M. (2024, September 19). *Budget outlook positive as North Dakota lawmakers prepare for next session*. North Dakota Monitor. <https://northdakotamonitor.com/2024/09/18/budget-outlook-positive-as-north-dakota-lawmakers-prepare-for-next-session/>.

³ Mackey, S. (2024, September 18). Taxes on wireless services: Cell phone tax rates by state. Tax Foundation. <https://taxfoundation.org/data/all/state/wireless-taxes-cell-phone-tax-rates-by-state-2024/>.



wireless tax burden, the adoption of a new 988 tax could have a real impact on telecommunications consumers.

If you choose to enact a new tax, CTIA would propose amendments to ensure that any new tax on telecommunications consumers is limited. The scope of the 988 tax should be limited to funding equipment, communications services, and direct costs for crisis hotline center personnel for 988 call-taking and appropriate call routing. The 988 system often has been compared to 911 taxes that fund only government-operated Public Safety Answering Points for call taking and routing. The 911 tax does not fund police, fire, or EMS services and relies instead on the state's general fund revenues. CTIA would ask that 988 funding be approached in the same manner. Any 988 tax should fund only the crisis centers for call-taking and routing. CTIA supports providing appropriate responses to people experiencing a mental health crisis, but we do not believe the cost for those services should be borne solely by the state's telecommunications consumers.

Moreover, if a fee is contemplated, there should be a single statewide fee, and local governments should be explicitly preempted in state law from imposing local 988 fees. This will ensure there is an effective statewide 988 coordination and prevent localities from shifting programs currently funded from general revenues to new fees on wireless consumers. A single statewide fee will also help ensure that North Dakota



wireless consumer taxes and fees are kept within reason.

In closing, the wireless industry looks forward to continuing to work with federal and state entities to ensure the successful implementation of 988 to help our fellow Americans experiencing a mental health crisis. We would encourage North Dakota to choose general and federal funding to support 988 and provide detailed estimates on 988 crisis hotline funding needs, before turning to telecommunications consumers to bear that cost. We welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor on this issue. Thank you for your consideration.

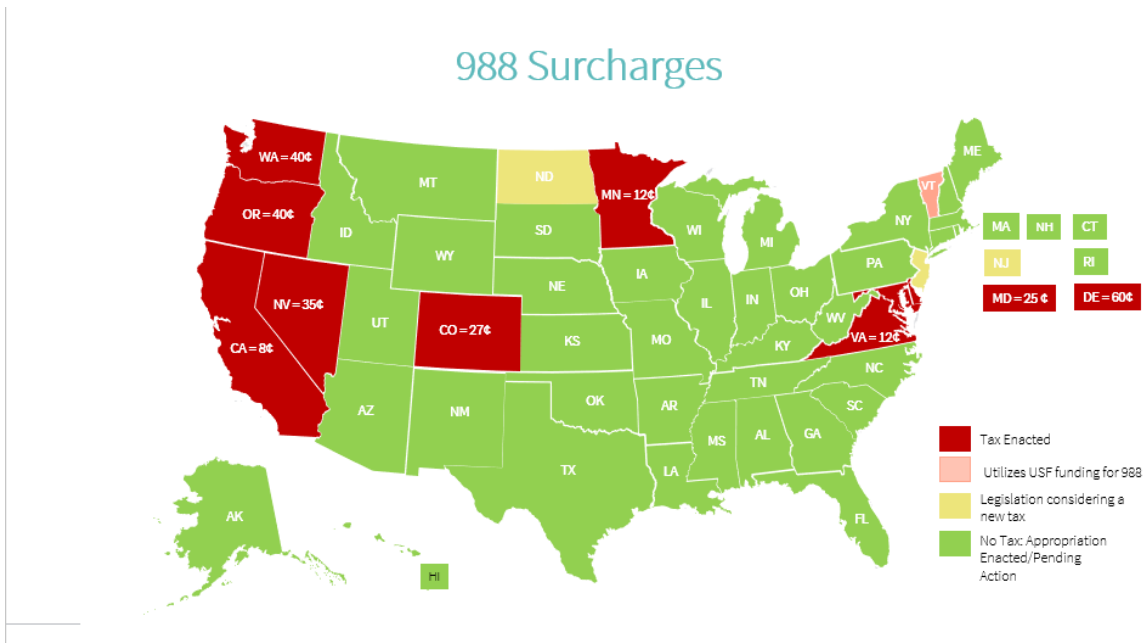


Figure 1

Senate Industry and Business Committee
Jan 20th, 2025 HB 2200
Testimony in Support

Dear Chair Barta and the members of the Senate Industry and Business Committee,

I urge a “Do Pass” on HB 2200

Last week the North Dakota Health and Human Services [released their findings](#) from the Suicide Fatality Review Commission. They paint a clear picture of significant need across multiple sectors. Our state also provides an unparalleled look into suicide data across populations through the [North Dakota Suicide Overview Dashboard](#)

I am the author of the [State of the State Report for LGBTQ+ Youth](#), which is a comprehensive report that looks at improving suicide outcomes for youth across our state. I am going to share some data slides from it below that are related to suicidality for these kids.

Figure 1.3 Suicide Behavior for Middle School Students (Ever in Their Life)

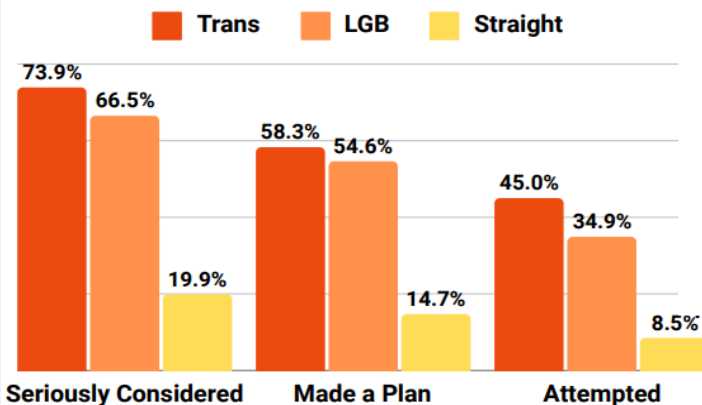
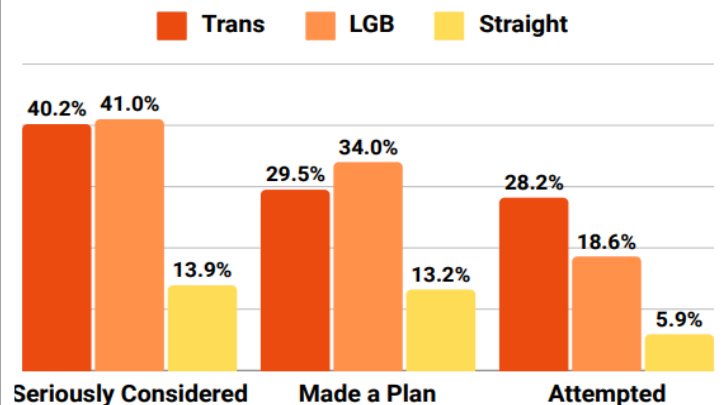


Figure 1.4 Suicide Behavior for High School Students (12 Months Before Survey)



Every day of my life is spent working to keep those numbers as low as possible and informing individuals about the problems we face. To put it bluntly, nearly a fifth of our kids are hopeless. Many deal with self harm, substance abuse, depression, and anxiety. They live in homes that aren't safe, have no access to food, and are doing their best to survive. Some of them are just thirteen or fourteen years old.

This bill is over my head. I don't know exactly what it does. I'm not here to tell you the best policies for governance. I am here for our kids. I am here to tell you there is an unmet need. With as scary as those numbers are above, only one in five actually reach out for help before attempting suicide. I'm a suicide survivor who was born and raised in this state and these numbers represent my youth. Whatever you can do to increase funding or support for suicide prevention, we need it. Please pass this bill.

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

Testimony in support of SB 2200

Senate Industry and Business Committee

Moriah Opp, suicide prevention advocate

January 20, 2025

Chairman Barta and members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Moriah Opp, and I am writing to express my support for SB 2200. In my ten years of experience working in suicide prevention at the local, state, and federal level, I know firsthand the importance of dedicated, sustainable funding and how it can impact the quality of and access to behavioral health crisis services.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), who oversees the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, just released the National Guidelines for a Behavioral Health Coordinated System of Crisis Care on January 15th of this year. In these updated guidelines, SAMHSA frames out requirements for 988 Lifeline & Other Behavioral Health Lines including accreditation processes and required training, effective coordination with other community resources, 988-911 coordination, 988 coordination with mobile crisis, coordination with service referrals, and data/quality improvement standards. Dedicated 988 funding ensures that North Dakota's 988 Lifeline can meet all the extensive requirements stated previously and for any further requirements sure to come.

The need for crisis support has grown steadily each year and will likely continue to rise as awareness of 988 expands. Suicide remains a leading cause of death in our state-184 people died by suicide in 2022 (NDVDRS data), and 14,120 Lifeline contacts made via FirstLink last year (<https://myfirstlink.org/data/>). Sustainable and dedicated 988 funding means that North Dakotans in crisis can receive support from someone local any time of day or night, 365 days a year.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 2200 to ensure that the 988 Lifeline can meet the needs of all North Dakotans in crisis.

Sincerely,

Moriah Opp, Grand Forks, ND

opp.moriah@gmail.com

Dear Chair Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

My name is Megan MacFarlane, and I am the Executive Director at M3. At M3, we are dedicated to raising awareness, eliminating the stigma, and connecting resources surrounding mental health. In the last year, I have worked with over 700 youth athletes in North Dakota, and seen firsthand the impact of their mental health on their day-to-day lives. While considering SB 2200, I urge you to think about what increased funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline could mean for someone in your life.

Mental health challenges do not discriminate by age, gender, or socioeconomic background. Research shows that suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10-14 and the leading cause of death for men under 35. Alarming, nearly 1 in 5 high school students in North Dakota have seriously considered suicide within the last year. For many, the struggle remains hidden due to stigma, embarrassment, or lack of access to help.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is an essential resource in addressing these alarming trends. Available via call or text 24/7, 988 provides free, confidential, and lifesaving support to individuals in crisis. In 2022 alone, over 49,000 Americans died by suicide, with an estimated 1.6 million attempts nationwide. North Dakota is not immune: 135 men in our state tragically died by suicide last year, representing a silent epidemic that we must confront.

This service is especially critical in rural areas, where mental health resources are often scarce. Thirty-one percent of Minnesotans and a significant percentage of North Dakotans live in areas without adequate access to mental health professionals. Without 988, many individuals in crisis would have nowhere to turn.

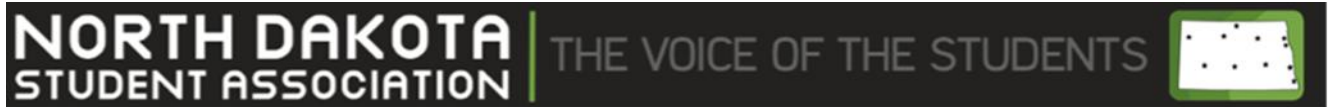
Beyond saving lives, 988 addresses the broader ripple effects of untreated mental health conditions. For instance, 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, yet it takes an average of 10 years for someone to seek help. By providing immediate assistance, 988 can help bridge this gap, preventing issues from escalating into costly outcomes like incarceration or hospitalization. It is far less costly to invest in increased funding for 988 than it is to continue investing in our incarceration process for those with severe mental illnesses.

The demand for 988 continues to grow, underscoring its necessity. Increased call, chat, and text volumes reported by FirstLink highlight that more North Dakotans are reaching out for help. Sustained and increased funding for 988 is not just a budgetary line item—it is a moral imperative. It sends a message that no one in crisis is alone and that North Dakota prioritizes the mental health of its citizens.

Thank you for your consideration and for supporting this critical initiative. Your support is essential to building stronger, more compassionate, and healthier communities across North Dakota.

Sincerely,

Megan MacFarlane
Executive Director
m3moorhead@gmail.com | 701-630-1658

**SB 2200**

January 23, 2025

Carter Gill, North Dakota Student Association

(701) 388-7589 | carter.gill@ndus.edu

Chair Barta 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.

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.

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Bill SB 2200. My name is Thea Jorgensen, and I am both an advocate for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and someone who has struggled with my mental health for over a decade. I am here 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. As someone who has been both on the calling end of a suicide prevention hotline and as a volunteer for one, I personally know the value these services provide.

There are a lot of misconceptions regarding those struggling and unless you have truly been there, it is extremely hard to understand how a seemingly simple phone call can save a life. While there are often signs and struggles leading up to the moment of crisis, studies from attempt survivors have shown that nearly half take less than ten minutes from decision to attempt. With all of the rural areas in our state, it is not always possible to get emergency services to people in that time frame, which is another reason the services are so vital.

As a member of the ND Army National Guard, I know that there have been significant strides in reducing the stigma around seeking help. I personally have been extremely impressed with our state's proactive approach in taking the issue seriously. However, as with any at risk population, the stigma does still remain. The ability to dial 988, press 1, is a simple way for them to talk through the struggle in real time.

I know there can be the mentality that because it is a service one may not use, they don't want to pay for it. The matter of fact is, that we truly never know if we will use it, but there is a chance that someone you care about will. I also know that finances are tight for many but the minimal annual fee seems to be reasonable if we know it saves even one life a year. North Dakotans look out for each other.

SB 2200 is vital to ensuring that our 988 services have the necessary funding and support to service people across the state of North Dakota who may be struggling and in crisis. In 2023 alone, FirstLink answered 14,284 calls directly related to suicide, and between 2022 and 2023 they saw a 61% increase in calls to 988 in North Dakota. The work of FirstLink and all of the partners that make 988 possible is critical to saving lives in our communities.

I encourage you to vote in favor of SB 2200 to secure the future of our 988 services.

Sincerely,
Thea Jorgensen

A photograph of three people hiking on a grassy hill at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The hikers are silhouetted against the bright light. The landscape is rugged with some rocks and sparse vegetation.

NORTH
Dakota Be Legendary.
Health & Human Services

North Dakota
Suicide Fatality Review Commission
2024 Annual Report

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a Commission, we would like to acknowledge and dedicate this recommendation report to the North Dakota lives that have been lost to suicide, individuals having suicidal experiences, and their family, friends and communities affected. We desire to improve the lives of all who are struggling. You are not alone.

Members of the North Dakota Suicide Fatality Review Commission are appointed by the North Dakota Health and Human Services (HHS) Commissioner and include:

- Adriane Knightstep, Disease Control & Forensic Pathology, State Forensic Examiner's Office, HHS
- Brad Hawk, Indian Health Systems Administrator, North Dakota Indian Affairs Office
- Daniel Cramer, Ph.D., Clinical Director, Regional Human Service Centers
- Jennifer Illich, Executive Director, FirstLink
- John Klug, Chief of Police, Minot Police Department
- Jon Ulven, Ph.D., L.P., Sanford Behavioral Health Fargo
- Kriste Ross, Cass County Coroner's Office
- Kodi Pinks, MPH, Surveillance & Data Management Director, Health Statistics & Performance, HHS
- *Melissa Markegard, MS, CHES, Suicide Prevention Administrator, HHS
- Russ Riehl, Principal, Simle Middle School, Bismarck Public Schools

- Samantha Christopherson, Executive Director, American Foundation of Suicide Prevention
- Sarah Kemp Tabbutt, LCSW, Fargo VA Health Care System
- Susan Roe, MD, Clinical Professor of Pathology, University of North Dakota
- Rep. Todd Porter, Owner, Metro-Area Ambulance Service, Inc.

*denotes Commission Coordinator/Presiding Officer

Data

- Kodi Pinks, MPH, Surveillance & Data Management Director, Health Statistics & Performance, HHS
- Tara Haugen, Lead Data Abstractor, Health Statistics & Performance, HHS
- Olivia Persinger, MPH, Epidemiologist, Health Statistics & Performance, HHS

Editors

- Melissa Markegard, MS, CHES, Suicide Prevention Administrator, Behavioral Health Division, HHS
- Laura Anderson - Policy Director, Behavioral Health Division, HHS
- Kodi Pinks, MPH, Surveillance & Data Management, Director Health Statistics & Performance, HHS
- Tracy K. Miller, PhD, MPH, State Epidemiologist, Health Statistics & Performance Section Director, HHS

INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE

During the 2023 legislative session, Gov. Burgum signed House Bill 1390, which created and enacted a new section to Chapter 23-07 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the creation of a Suicide Fatality Review Commission.

This mandated that North Dakota Health and Human Services (HHS) establish the state Suicide Fatality Review Commission (Commission). The purpose of the Commission is to decrease the number of preventable suicides through systematic review of North Dakota suicide fatalities conducted by a multidisciplinary team of professionals and subject matter experts.

The reviews are used to generate data driven suicide prevention recommendations, which are shared with stakeholders and the HHS Commissioner to be incorporated into statewide suicide prevention efforts/strategies.

The Commission shall review suicide deaths that have occurred in the state with the goals of:

1. Identifying the risk factors, protective factors, systems, and services involved in each case;
2. Recommending policies, protocols, and other actions to improve community, service, and system responses to individuals at risk of suicide; and
3. Providing consultation and coordination for agencies involved in the prevention and investigation of suicide.

The Commission came to fruition in October 2023 with an initial meeting of the appointed members. The first Commission meeting to review cases commenced in January 2024.



BACKGROUND

Suicide in North Dakota

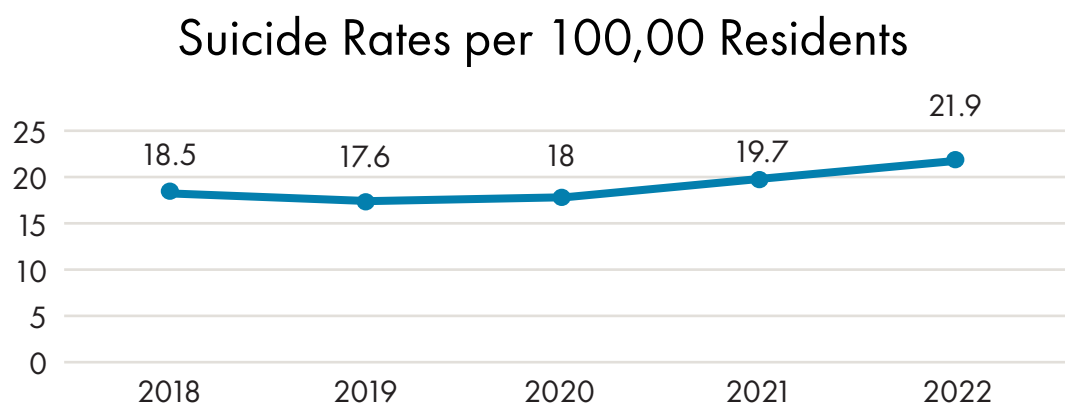
According to the HHS' Vital Records, in 2022, suicide was the ninth leading cause of death in the state, with 171 deaths and a crude death rate of 21.9 per 100,000 residents (Figure 1). Rates were calculated using 2020 Census figures.

Figure 1: Top 10 Leading Causes of Death in North Dakota (ND) in 2022

Leading Causes of Death	Crude death rate per 100,000 Residents
Heart Disease	195.7
Cancer	154.9
Accidents	57.4
Alzheimer's Disease	48.5
Stroke	40.6
COVID-19	40.4
Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases	39.3
Diabetes	28.2
Suicide	21.9
Chronic Liver Disease/Cirrhosis	18.0

The rate of suicide in ND increased from 18.5 per 100,000 in 2018 to 21.9 per 100,000 in 2022, which is a 27.6% increase (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Suicide rates, 2018-2022

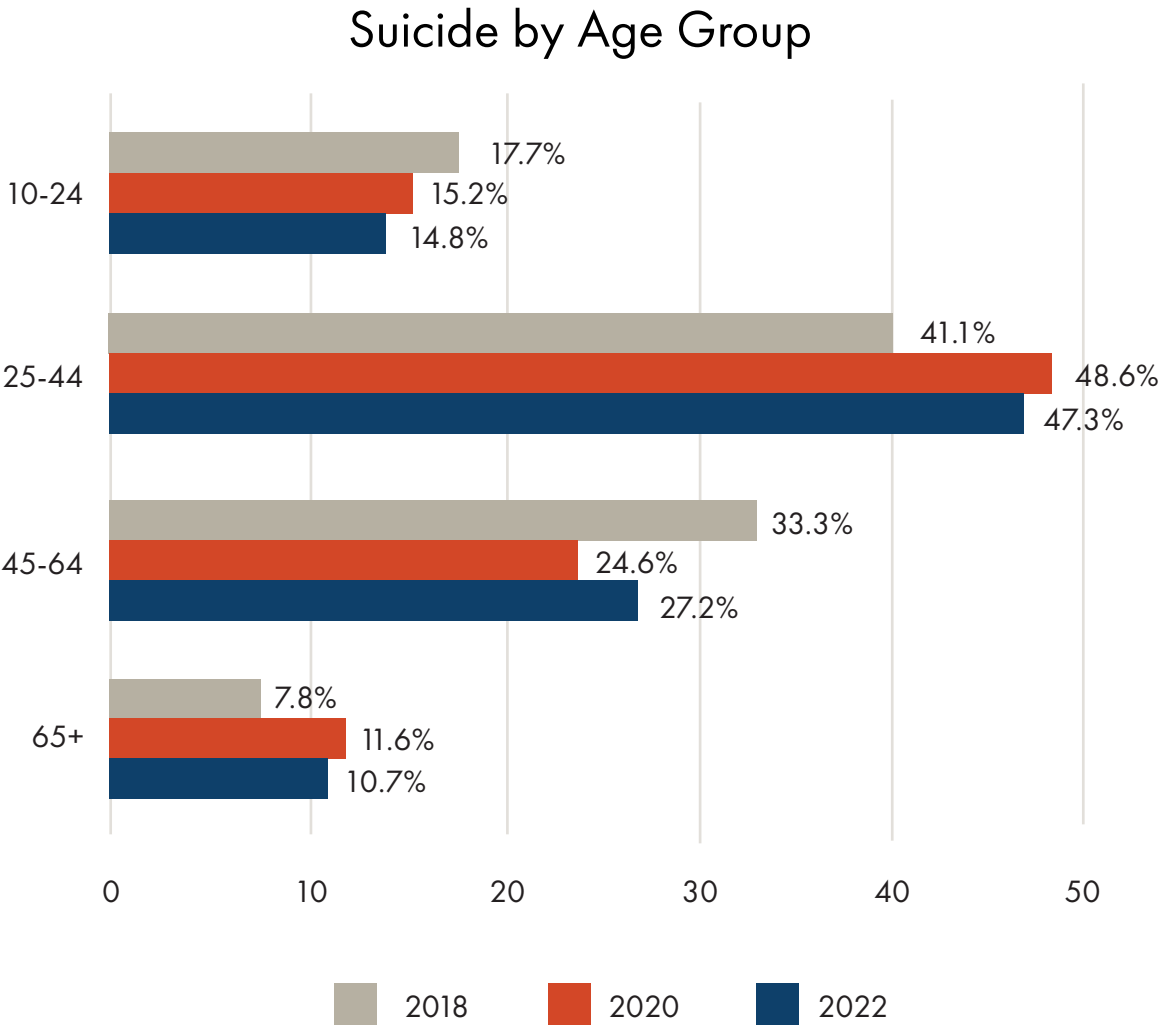


Some groups are at increased risk for suicide. In 2022, the incidence of male suicide deaths was six times that of females in ND. Almost 85% of all suicide deaths in ND were male. Rates of male suicide in ND increased by 33.1% from 27.8 per 100,000 to 37.0 per 100,000 and the rate of female suicide decreased by 33.7% from 9.2 per 100,000 to 6.1 per 100,000.

Among the different racial and ethnic identities in ND, nearly 88% of the suicide deaths in 2022 were among non-Hispanic White residents. Non-Hispanic White residents make up the largest racial group in ND at 82% of the population. American Indian (AI)/Alaskan Native (AN) individuals accounted for 7.1% of the total number of suicides in 2022, and when looking at the rates to account for differences in population size, AI/AN had the highest rate of suicide at 37.7 per 100,000 compared to non-Hispanic Whites at 23.5 per 100,000.

Those aged 25 - 44 in ND had the highest proportion of suicides in 2022 with almost half of the deaths at 46.8%, followed by the 45 - 64-year-olds at 26.9%, 10 - 24-year-olds at 14.6%, and those aged 65 and older at 10.5% (Figure 3). The rate of suicide in the 25 - 44-year-old age group increased by 28.5% from 28.4 per 100,000 in 2018 to 36.5 per 100,000 in 2022.

Figure 3: Suicide by age groups, 2018-2022



METHOD OF COMMISSION REVIEW

1. North Dakota has a specific review board in place for child fatalities, so reviewed cases are limited to adults, age 18 and older. A total of four to six cases were reviewed by the Commission, quarterly. Every effort was made to choose one to two cases from each quadrant of the state. For the 2022 review of suicide deaths, a total of 18 cases were selected from the total number of 184 for in-depth review and discussion. This represents 9.8% of the suicide deaths that occurred in ND in 2022.
2. Case information is obtained from the NDVDR Program. The NDVDR Program collects information on suicides from death certificates, coroners/medical examiner reports, law enforcement reports, toxicology results, electronic health records, and ambulance run data. Chapter 23-07 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the creation of a Suicide Fatality Review Commission provides the state Suicide Fatality Review Commission statutory authority to obtain relevant records for the purpose of suicide case reviews. Case narratives are created by the NDVDR Program team, which contain demographic information, medical history, associated risk factors for suicide, and other relevant information for case reviews.
3. Cases are reviewed confidentially by the Commission and evidence-based prevention recommendations are identified. For each case, committee members rely on the available documentation to determine systemic recommendations for suicide prevention.
4. Trends among the cases are highlighted and identified, allowing analysis of the most frequently recommended suicide prevention strategies and the ability to determine areas of missed opportunities for intervention to prevent future suicide deaths.

LIMITATIONS

The cases reviewed by the Commission are not representative of all suicide deaths that occurred in ND in 2022. Furthermore, thorough reviews were difficult to conduct on certain cases due to limited information contained in the coroner/medical examiner reports and law enforcement reports. Some of the decedents did not have any medical records or ambulance run data, which captures information on health care encounters and health status. Lastly, some risk factors, such as sexual orientation and adverse childhood experiences, were not well documented in the records available and have a high proportion of missingness.

CASE REVIEW DATA

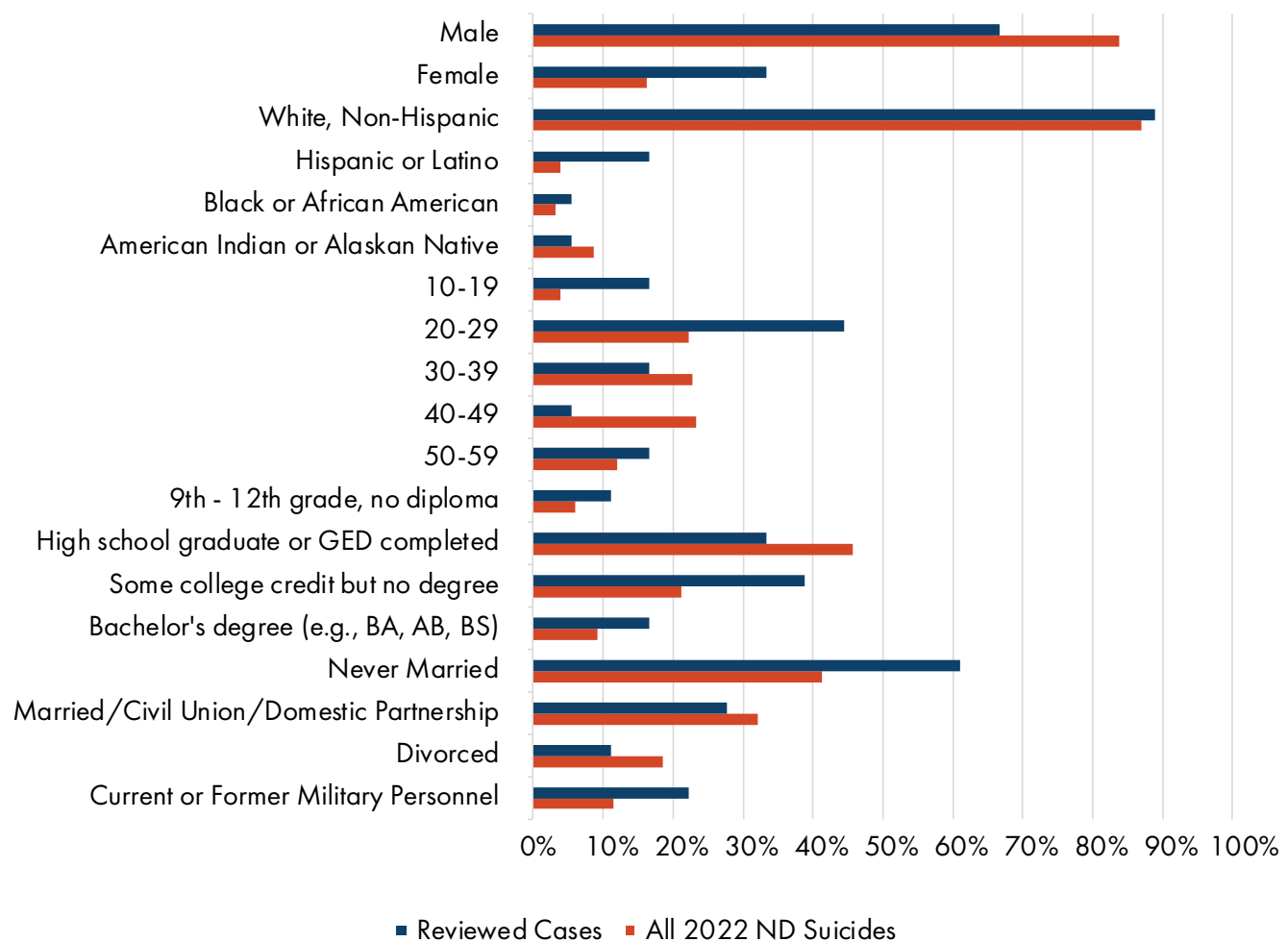
The data provided in the rest of this report comes from the NDVDR Program. The numbers represent both ND residents and out-of-state residents where the initial injury causing the death occurred in ND. These numbers will not match Vital Records data because it's not based on ND residency.

Demographics

Male suicide deaths composed 66.7% of the cases reviewed. White non-Hispanics comprised 83.3% of cases, followed by Hispanics (16.7%), African American/Black (5.6%), and American Indian/Alaska Natives (5.6%). Most of the decedents (44.4%) were between the ages of 20-29. Approximately one-third of the cases had some college credit but no degree (38.9%). Just over half of cases had never been married (61.1%). Lastly, almost a quarter of selected cases (22.2%) were Current or Former Military Personnel (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Demographics of cases reviewed compared to all 2022 ND Suicides

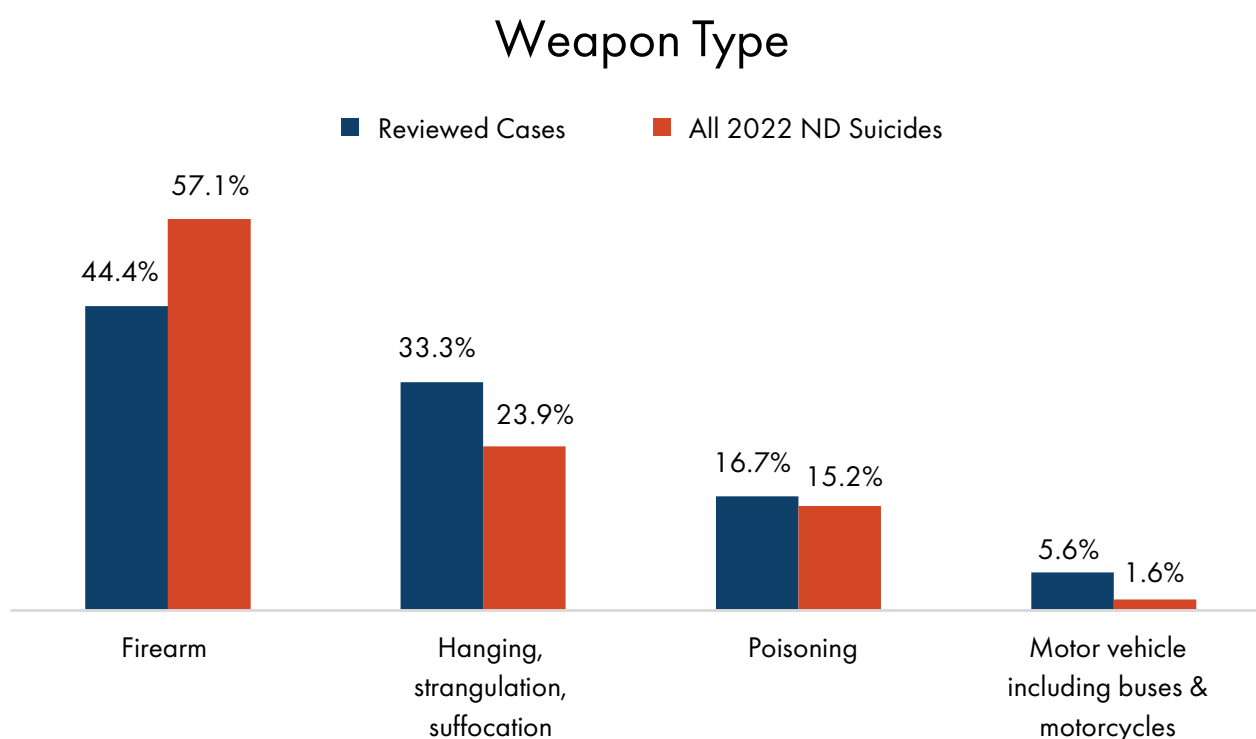
Demographics of cases reviewed compared to all 2022 ND Suicides



Incident Details

Of the suicide deaths reviewed by the Commission, nearly half (44.4%) were completed using a firearm, followed by hanging, strangulation and suffocation (33.3%) (Figure 5). Among suicide deaths involving a firearm, 87.5% used a handgun. Documentation showed that among the firearm suicide deaths, about 50.0% were stored loaded and 37.5% were not locked.

Figure 5: Weapon type used in the cases reviewed compared to all 2022 ND suicides.



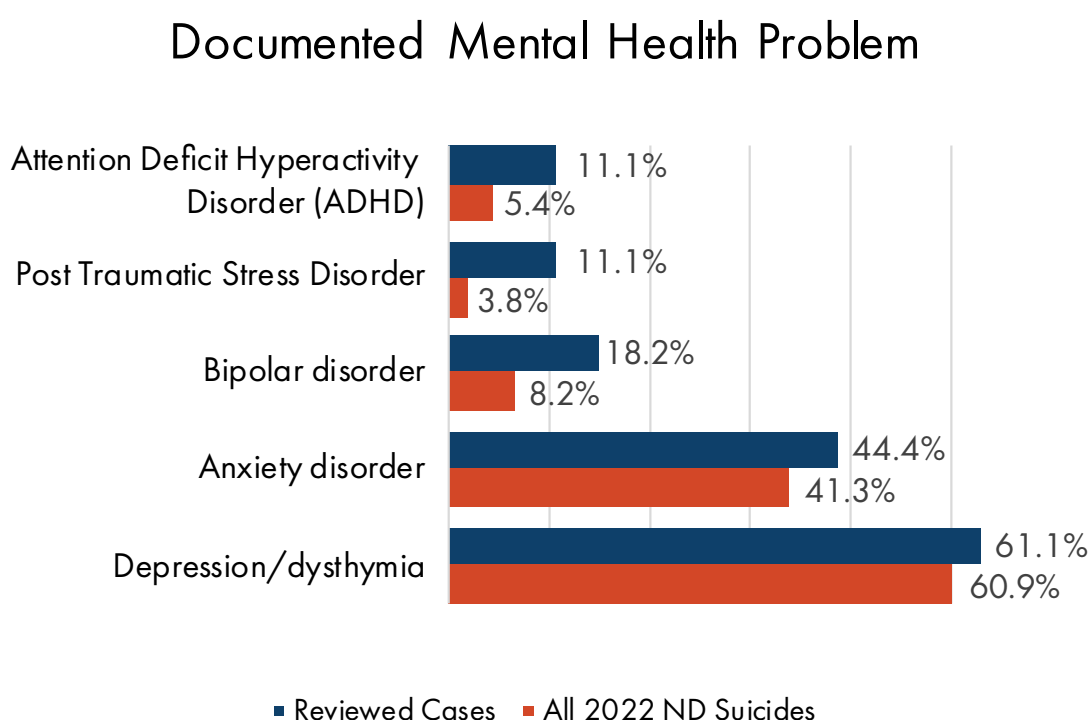
Physical Health

Just over a quarter (27.8%) of the reviewed cases had documentation of at least one contributing physical health problem. Among the documented physical health problems, chronic pain was the most prevalent (80.0%), followed by other illnesses (60.0%). Over half of the cases (55.6%) had a health care encounter within 30 days of their death and 16.7% of the cases had encounters occurring between one to six months prior to death. Additionally, half of the cases had previously been diagnosed with COVID-19, with 88.9% testing positive within six months of their death and 33.3% testing positive at the time of their death.

Behavioral Health History

Over half (61.1%) of all reviewed cases had documentation of a mental health problem. The mental health problem identified most often was depression/dysthymia at 61.1% followed by anxiety disorder at 44.4% (Figure 6). Over three-quarters (83.3%) of the reviewed cases had reportedly been in a depressed mood leading up to their death. Over half (55.6%) of the reviewed cases were currently in mental health/substance use treatment and two-thirds (66.7%) were treated for mental health or substance use problems at some point in their lives.

Figure 6: Mental health problem reported in cases reviewed compared to all 2022 ND suicides.

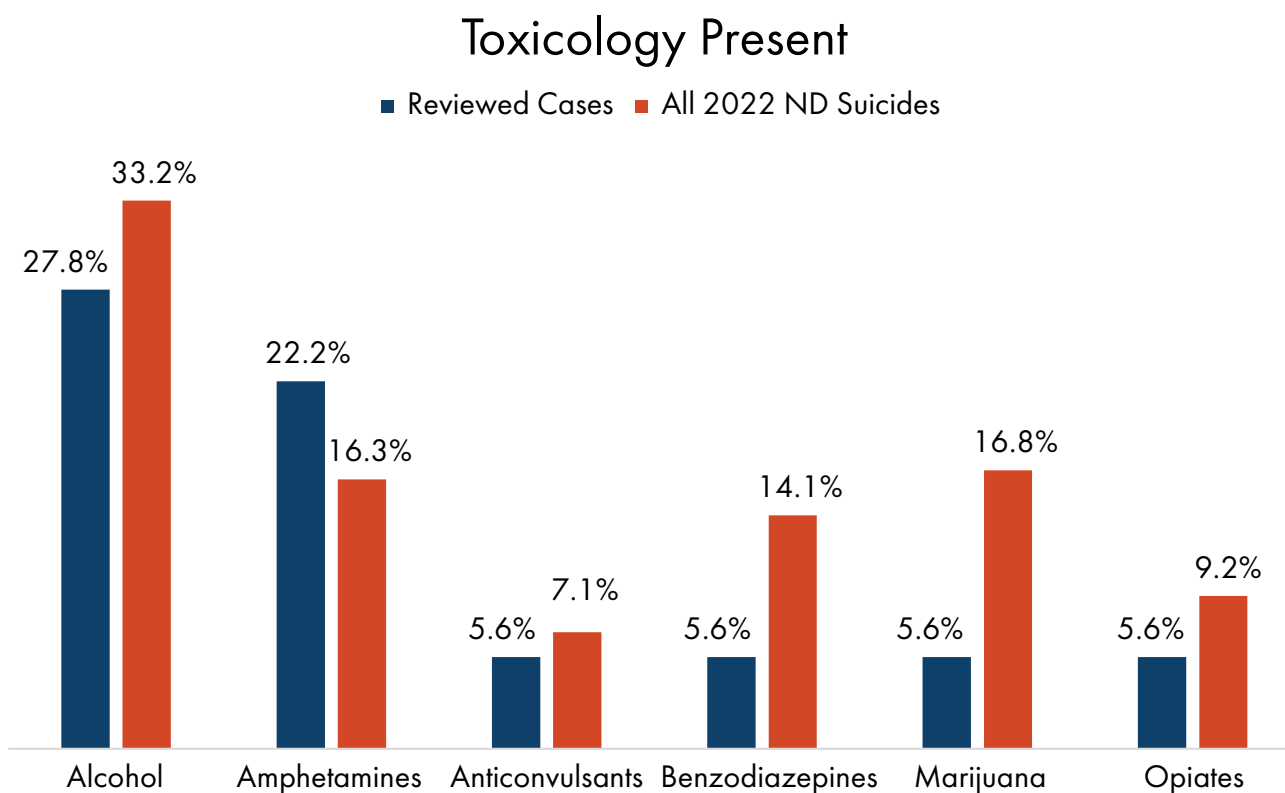


Notably, over a third of the reviewed cases had documentation of a prior suicide attempt (33.3%) and over half (55.6%) had documentation of suicidal thoughts or plans at some point in their life. Over half (55.6%) of the cases disclosed intent to die by suicide and of those who disclosed intent, the most prevalent disclosures were made to previous/current intimate partners at 40% followed by other family members at 30%. Also, 55.6% of the individuals had left a handwritten or electronic suicide note at the scene.

Substance Use History

One in three of the reviewed cases had a documented alcohol problem (38.9%) and/or other substance use problem (33.3%). An alcohol problem is defined by NDVDR as a person having alcohol dependence including cases where the individual was perceived by self and others to have a problem with, or to be addicted to, alcohol. It also includes individuals that were participating in an alcohol rehabilitation program or treatment. Other substance use is defined by NDVDR as a person having non-alcohol related substance misuse problems including cases where the individual was perceived by self and others to have a problem with, or to be addicted to, drugs other than alcohol. It also includes individuals that were participating in a drug rehabilitation program or treatment. Toxicology analysis was conducted on (88.9%) of the cases and almost all of those analyzed had at least one drug in their system at the time of death (93.8%), which includes alcohol at 27.8%. The toxicology results include both prescribed and/or illicit drugs (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Toxicology present in cases reviewed compared to all 2022 ND suicides



Life Stressors

Over half (55.6%) of the reviewed cases had documentation of intimate partner problems (e.g., divorce, separation, infidelity, etc.) and one-third (33.3%) had family relationship problems (e.g., family discord). In 38.9% of the cases, the individuals had an argument or conflict preceding their death. Other stressors identified were contributing criminal legal problems (33.3%) and civil legal problems (11.1%). One-third (33.3%) of the cases were experiencing job problems and almost one-fifth (16.7%) of cases were experiencing financial problems. Nearly a quarter (22.2%) of the cases were experiencing a recent eviction or loss of home.

COMMISSION CASE DISCUSSION

The following discussion points are based on findings from the Commission. There are overlapping members of the Commission on both the Cass County Suicide Fatality Review Team and the Child Fatality Review Panel. While specific cases are not discussed between groups, these overlapping members are able to provide a well-rounded knowledge of all suicide cases reviewed in North Dakota each year.

These should be utilized to decrease suicide in communities throughout North Dakota by incorporating them into community and statewide suicide prevention efforts.



Health Care

Improve access to appropriate mental health care services by:

- Increasing access to specific evidence-based care for trauma.
- Increasing access to specific evidence-based care for suicide prevention.
- Implementing mental health screenings as part of discharge planning from rehabilitation settings.
- Increasing community awareness of support organizations to assist during the immediate crisis and into recovery.
- Improving support for individuals with past childhood or adult trauma (domestic violence, sexual assault, loss of a loved one, etc.).
- Providing additional training for family and loved ones as part of mental health treatment.

Increase usage of the Suicide Care Pathway across all health systems (as recommended by the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention 2024) established in health records and identifiable across systems by:

- Increasing implementation of best practices for prevention in health care systems (i.e. Zero Suicide).
- Improving emergency department and inpatient hospital discharge practices following a suicide attempt or suicidal ideation crisis through established follow-up protocols and case management.
- Increasing access to remote mental health management resources (telehealth therapy/psychiatry/addiction support appointments, virtual support groups, peer support).
- Leveraging HHS programs such as Community Connect and Medicaid 1915(i).
- Utilizing Best Practices in Care Transitions for Individuals with Suicide Risk: Inpatient Care to Outpatient Care | National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (theactionalliance.org).
- Increasing pharmacy involvement by rating lethality of prescriptions as routine medical care (relative risk to lethality).
- Increasing collaborative safety planning as standard for discharging from inpatient hospitalization as well as implement safety planning trainings, with each health care site dedicating champions for risk assessments and safety planning.
- Improving integration of all health systems across North Dakota.
- Increasing involvement of family/friends in care whenever possible.

Increase training for health care staff to better screen individuals struggling with mental health issues by implementing usage of the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) screening tool within:

- Emergency Departments.
- Patients struggling with chronic pain.
- Patients struggling with insomnia (trouble sleeping).
- Patients with known substance use disorders and/or substance misuse.
- Patients who have recently had a substantial change in health for known/unknown reasons.

Provide lethal means safety training for all health care providers and pharmacists.

Encourage licensing boards to require suicide specific trainings/continuing education in suicide prevention.

Criminal Justice/Legal System

Improve standards of care within the criminal justice system by improving care coordination post-release by:

- Warm hand off to alcohol/substance use treatment and/or peer support.
- Collaborative safety plan as standard for discharge/release.
- Potential interventions with high-risk populations such as an opt-out of therapy as part of probation.

Increase education and training on evidence-based suicide prevention and intervention for corrections health and custody staff:

- Safety planning
- C-SSRS

Increase education and training on evidence-based suicide prevention and intervention for professionals within 'waiting periods' (pending charges, awaiting trial, awaiting sentencing) of the criminal justice/legal system such as lawyers, public defenders, and Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR).

Implement screening of individuals incarcerated at arrival into the system for potential dependents who are involved in the imprisonment experience and assigning a social worker to those children to follow them through their experience of losing a parent to the system.

Crisis Response

Increase access to appropriate mental health/substance use services (e.g. transport, referral to treatment).

Increase education and training on evidence-based suicide prevention and intervention for first responders (EMS, Fire, Law Enforcement, etc.).

Develop protocol for warm hand offs within Human Service Center (Community Behavioral Health) Clinics and to outpatient care.

Increase the usage of peer support directly related to suicide.



Community

Increase protective factors for all North Dakota citizens within the communities where they live, work, and play by:

- Improving access to social support resources such as housing, employment, insurance, transportation, etc.
- Improving social connectedness at the community level.
- Increasing education and awareness of population-based mental health and wellness resources.
- Establishing the importance of parental time, resources, and conflict resolution.
- Increasing access to food, rental assistance, and other assistance needs.

Increase early intervention by:

- Increasing the usage of 988 and warmlines.
- Increasing public awareness/knowledge of suicide risk for those with chronic pain, narcolepsy/lack of sleep.
- Decreasing stigma by normalizing and increasing mental health help-seeking behavior.
- Increasing access to support and positive connections for those individuals navigating their own identity.

Increase gatekeeper training for community members to identify people who may be at risk of suicide and how to respond effectively by:

- Educating on safety planning.
- Increasing knowledge about those who may be at increased risk such as a change in intimate partner or a change in life circumstances, recent high school graduate, etc.

Implement behavioral health into workforce safety by:

- Creating workplace suicide prevention intervention when a drug testing is required.
- Increasing education and awareness for employers on suicide prevention and mental health for all employees.
- Employer encouragement of wellness and connectedness.
- Increasing support for co-workers of those who die by suicide.
- Improving training to Human Resources and managers/supervisors on big emotions during disciplinary actions, providing and encouraging Employee Assistance Program (EAP), etc.
- Reducing punitive effects for seeking mental health assistance/support.
- Increasing education on EAP services to decrease family stress, improve family dynamics/home environment.
- Normalizing and increasing mental health supports for first responders (opt out vs. opt in).

Reduce access to lethal means by people who are at acute risk of suicide (safe storage of medications, firearms, ammunition, and household products) by:

- Providing CALM training/additional education to families about suicide risk and how to limit access to lethal means.
- Addressing access to lethal means for those with acute mental health crises.
- Providing education for families about additional suicide risk along with reducing access to lethal means.

Improve access to suicide loss and suicide attempt survivor support by:

- Providing resources for postvention after a death has occurred within a community.
- Improving follow up and support for survivors within the first-year post-death of a loved one.

Improve death investigation in North Dakota by:

- Increasing use of the Suicide Critical Risk Assessment Profile (SCRAP) form by coroners/death investigators to enhance available information that will better inform future recommendations.
- Providing education to coroners/death investigators on importance of a thorough investigation and how the information is used within the Suicide Fatality Review Commission across North Dakota.
- Providing training and resources for coroners and death investigators on survivor resources.
- Expanding access to the SCRAP to investigating law enforcement officers.



COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion points outlined previously, the Commission identified and prioritized the following priority recommendations. These recommendations were selected to best serve those at risk for suicide with the goal to reduce rates of suicide in North Dakota.

Decrease Stigma and Increase Help-Seeking Behavior

Out of the 18 cases that were reviewed, 55.6% of the cases utilized the health care system within 30 days prior to their death. This information can be used to target suicide prevention activities across all health care settings, especially within emergency departments.

Increase Training for Health Care Staff to Better Screen and Treat Depression

When looking at all the 184 deaths by suicide, over half of them were in a current depressed mood leading up to their deaths (63.6%). These individuals may have benefited from better screening practices and treatment options for depression. For example, while it is common practice for primary care doctors to screen for depression, it often appeared decedents might have been connected to helpful treatment if it was more common for specialty practitioners to conduct depression screenings, as well.

Improve Social Connectedness

Of the 184 deaths by suicide, 67.9% were individuals who fell into the categories of divorced, widowed, separated, or never married. Research shows that unmarried individuals are at higher risk of suicide compared to their married counterparts and our review indicates that this might, in part, be due to lack of social connectedness. Since employment can serve as another natural social support, the Commission found one-fourth of all decedents were either retired or unemployed, suggesting further instances of isolation.

Reduce Access to Lethal Means by People Who Are at Acute Risk for Suicide

In 2022, North Dakota had 184 total deaths by suicide. The primary method used was firearms at 57.1%, followed by hanging, strangulation, and suffocation at 22.3%, and poisoning at 14.1%. The most common firearm type used was handguns at 73.0%. In 18.1% of the deaths involving firearms, the firearms were easily

accessible, loaded, and not locked. In two instances, the firearms were stolen.

Improve Access to Suicide Loss and Suicide Attempt Survivor Support

At this time, it is unknown how many next of kin or friends were present at the scene of the death. Of the 184 deaths by suicide, 40.8% had an intimate partner problem that was identified. A quarter of the cases had an argument/conflict preceding their death and in almost half of those cases, the injury that led to their death occurred during the argument (45.9%). While losing a loved one by suicide is always difficult, being present during the terminal event adds an extra layer of trauma that often goes unaddressed. Future reviews will attempt to gather this information.

Increase Gatekeeper Training for Community Members

The Commission identified gatekeeper training as a helpful preventive measure. Of the 184 deaths by suicide, 41.1% recently disclosed suicidal thoughts or intent to die ahead of their deaths. Most of the disclosures were made to a previous or current intimate partner at 54.0%.

Improve Resource Provisions for Those at Risk Regardless of Suicide Risk Assessment Results

Of the 184 deaths by suicide, 55% of decedents had no history of suicidal thoughts or plans noted within their case data. Due to this, they might not have screened positive on a suicide risk assessment. However, most of the decedents had other known risk factors that could have been identified by medical providers including belonging to a high-risk group such as veterans or those with other mental health issues. These indications alone should prompt providers to offer patients mental health resources regardless of whether the individual self-reports suicidal ideation or not.



Improve Access to Appropriate Mental Health Services

Of the 184 deaths by suicide, 54.9% were treated for mental health or substance misuse at some point in their life. Improving access can mean many things, including but not limited to, moving an individual to a higher level of care, adjusting diagnoses to a more appropriate fit, or improving medication management, or adding services and supports where they are lacking.

Improve Access to Social Support Services Such as Housing, etc.

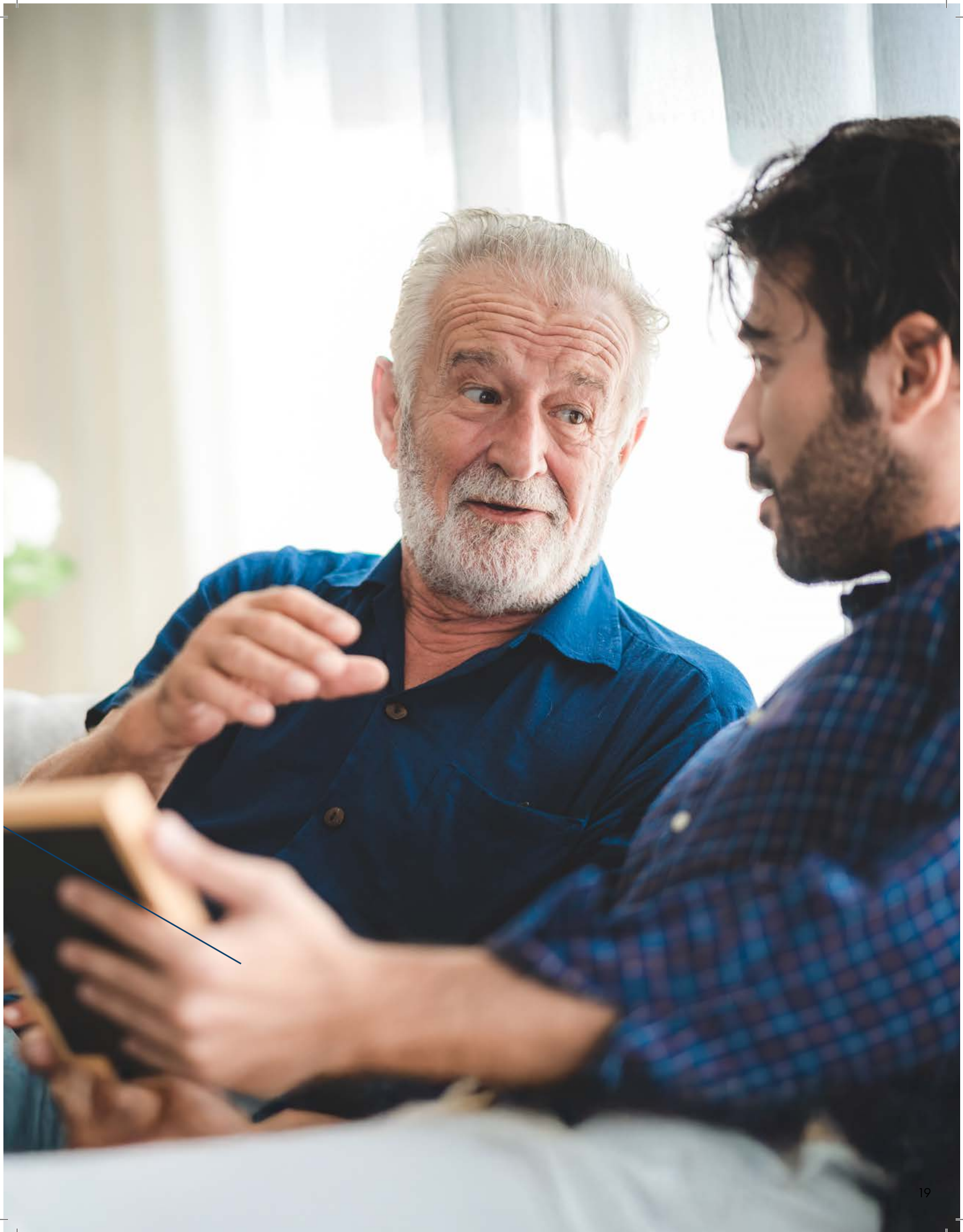
When looking at all 184 deaths due to suicide, approximately four percent of them had experienced eviction or loss of home leading up to their death. Another 11.4% had financial problems listed as a source of stress in their life prior to death.

CONCLUSION

The North Dakota Suicide Fatality Review Commission successfully met its goal to complete thorough case reviews of a sample of suicide deaths that occurred in North Dakota in 2022 (18/184 suicide deaths) to identify evidence-based prevention measures.

The findings of the Commission suggest a wide array of prevention opportunities including reducing access to all forms of lethal means, improving access to suicide loss and suicide attempt survivor support, increasing gatekeeper training for community members, improving social connectedness, decreasing stigma and increasing help-seeking behavior, improving resource provisions for those at risk regardless of suicide risk assessment results, increasing training for health care staff to better screen and treat depression, improving access to appropriate behavioral health services, and improving access to social support services such as housing.

Going forward, the Commission intends to also review epidemiologic trends provided by the NDVDR program within all the suicide deaths in North Dakota along with the selected case reviews.



NORTH
Dakota | Health & Human Services
Be Legendary.

Dear Chairman Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2200. It is imperative that North Dakota continues to provide free, confidential phone, chat, and text support through the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline to keep our communities safe from suicide.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important legislation.

Respectfully,
Paige Fabre



Great Plains Housing Authority

Serving Dickey, Eddy, Foster, Logan, Sargent, Stutsman, and Wells Counties

To: Senate Industry and Business Public Hearing

From: David Klein, GPHA Executive Director

Date: January 20, 2025

Re: SB 2200

Great Plains Housing Authority (GPHA) serves seven counties in North Dakota with federal rental assistance. Our agency collaborates frequently with governmental agencies, service providers, health care providers, churches, cities, developers, farming organizations, and veterans service offices and others to help individuals access services quickly and identify any critical needs.

FirstLink is a constant provider of information and referral services. FirstLink is that immediate contact for individuals thinking about suicide or needing behavioral health services. There are countless calls that FirstLink answers de-escalating situations and providing hope to individuals, while giving law enforcement and others time to respond and react appropriately.

Communities, law enforcement, schools, and others are struggling to help those in crisis. FirstLink CAN provide that immediate bridge to help in these urgent situations.

FirstLink has extremely high standards in working with individuals. The high standard includes being the ONLY agency constantly updating service and agency databases through outreach.

GPHA supports SB 2200 funding FirstLink and expanding services.

Mailing address: 300 2nd Ave NE – Suite 200, Jamestown, ND 58401

Toll free: 800-340-4537

Phone: 701-252-1098

Fax: 701-252-7735

Web: www.greatplainsha.com

Email: office@greatplainsha.com

Locations: Carrington, Ellendale, Jamestown, New Rockford



Dear Chair Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

It is of utmost importance to support SB 2200 to ensure the continued and increased funding of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

There are many North Dakotans who benefit from this service. This support service is key to providing efficient appropriate care that would otherwise usurp other healthcare services that are less appropriate. When this service isn't available, there can be an increase in 911/EMS calls that use up those services as well as law enforcement and visits to emergency rooms.

Maintaining the 988 lifeline provides free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans. This lifeline can provide an understanding voice during times of crisis and can support a person through this critical time, followed up by directing them to appropriate mental health care.

FirstLink's reports of increasing call, chat, and text volumes underscore a growing and urgent need. Suicide remains a leading cause of death in our state, with over 130 lives lost in 2021—a sobering statistic that exceeds the national average.

Sustained funding is not just a necessity; **it is a lifeline** for addressing mental health crises, particularly in rural areas where access to resources is often limited. Ensuring these services remain available and adequately funded sends a clear message: no one in crisis has to face their struggles alone.

Thank you for your consideration and for supporting this critical initiative.

Sincerely,
Lisa Thorp, RN

ND resident

Dear Chair Barta and Members of the Industry and Business Committee,

As a school counselor and mental health advocate, I strongly urge your support for SB 2200 to ensure the continued and increased funding of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Every day, I witness the challenges young people and families face in managing mental health struggles. The 988 Lifeline provides free, confidential, and lifesaving support to North Dakotans of all ages, serving as a critical resource for those who feel overwhelmed or isolated. FirstLink's reports of increasing call, chat, and text volumes highlight the growing need for these services in our communities.

Suicide is a leading cause of death among young people in North Dakota. Between 2004 and 2021, the suicide rate among individuals aged 10 to 24 increased by 46.2%, rising from 11.9 to 17.5 per 100,000 population. Additionally, there was a 33% increase in suicide ideation and attempts among this age group between 2018 and 2021.

[NORC at the University of Chicago](#)

Sustained funding for the 988 Lifeline is essential. For many students and families, this service is a bridge to hope and healing, ensuring they have someone to turn to in moments of crisis.

By supporting SB 2200, you are not only addressing a pressing need but also making a profound statement about the value of mental health and the well-being of our community.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering this critical initiative.

Respectfully,

Robin Nein

School Counselor West Fargo Public Schools

TESTIMONY
Senate Industry, Business and Labor Committee
SB 2200
January 20, 2025
Senator Kathy Hogan

Chairman Barta and members of the Industry Business and Labor Committee, my name is Kathy Hogan, and I represent District 21 which is central Fargo and 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.

During the bill development in 2023, we worked closing with the Tax Department regarding the language and collection process for phone fees. They requested \$50,000 funding to set up the collection process and felt at that time they could handle this collection process without additional funding.

We also met with the ND Department of Human Services regarding the list of available federal funding options listed in the letter from the wireless telecommunication representative and learned that all those resources are currently designated.

Philosophically I oppose fees, but I recognize that without a funding source this essential infrastructure would probably not be considered for general fund dollars. When 911 was first established, many opposed the fee on phones, but because of the direct relationship between the fee and the service provided, those concerns have dwindled. We need a parallel system for mental health services.

First Link is the private agency currently providing the 988 services. They did receive a startup grant of about \$450,000 in 2022 to purchase some needed additional equipment, but the core funding to answer the calls, maintain all the local resources to respond and to pay a living wage is not there. Some state funding is being provided. This bill will strengthen a critical piece of crisis response network. Attached is a summary document from the National Alliance on Mental Illness regarding the needed continuum of care. In 2024, it appears the FirstLink responded to over 14,000 calls/texts regarding suicide. I have also attached a list of other data on the increase of suicidal thoughts and actions, particularly in young people.

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.

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Industry and Business Committee Fort Union Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
1/21/2025

A bill relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund; to provide for a legislative management study.

11:08 a.m. Chairman Barta opened the hearing.

Members present: Chairman Barta, Vice-Chair Boehm, Senator Klein, Senator Kessel, Senator Enget

Discussion Topics:

- Broadband companies and cell phone fees
- Charitable gambling
- Mental and behavioral health issues

11:08 a.m. Chairman Barta led the discussion with committee on funding mechanisms and amount generated by fees.

11:17 a.m. Chairman Barta closed the hearing.

Audrey Oswald, Committee Clerk

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Industry and Business Committee Fort Union Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
1/27/2025

A bill relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund and the imposition of a 988 access fee; to provide for a legislative management report; to provide an appropriation; to provide a continuing appropriation; and to provide an effective date.

10:01 a.m. Chairman Barta opened the hearing.

Members present: Chairman Barta, Vice-Chairman Boehm, Senator Klein, Senator Kessel, Senator Enget

Discussion Topics:

- Fiscal aspect
- Tobacco Settlement Fund
- Projected fee revenue
- Itemized information on expenditures
- Removal of phone line charges
- Behavioral Health funds
- History on previous similar bills
- Community Health Trust Fund
- Marketing
- Health and Human Services Department

10:02 a.m. Senator Kessel updated committee on projected revenues.

10:02 a.m. Chairman Barta closed the hearing.

Audrey Oswald, Committee Clerk

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Industry and Business Committee Fort Union Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
1/28/2025

A bill relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund and the imposition of a 988 access fee; to provide for a legislative management report; to provide an appropriation; to provide a continuing appropriation; and to provide an effective date.

10:02 a.m. Chairman Barta opened the hearing.

Members present: Chairman Barta, Vice-Chairman Boehm, Senator Klein, Senator Kessel, Senator Enget

Discussion Topics:

- Itemized cost breakdown
- Total estimated cost of FTE's
- Language relating to phone fees
- Appropriation adjustments
- FTE budget
- Operation costs
- Behavioral and mental health
- Previously set aside funding
- Section removal clarification
- Existing programs and funding

10:03 a.m. Chairman Barta led discussion on updates and proposed amendments.

10:11 a.m. Chairman Barta closed the hearing.

Audrey Oswald, Committee Clerk

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Industry and Business Committee Fort Union Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
2/3/2025

A bill relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund and the imposition of a 988 access fee; to provide for a legislative management report; to provide an appropriation; to provide a continuing appropriation; and to provide an effective date.

9:41 a.m. Chairman Barta opened the hearing.

Member's present: Chairman Barta, Vice-Chairman Boehm, Senator Klein, Senator Enget

Members absent: Senator Kessel

Discussion Topics:

- Fee issue resolution
- Resistance of communications networks
- Importance and statistics
- Access fee

9:42 a.m. Chairman Barta began committee discussion on language clarification and answered committee questions.

9:48 a.m. Senator Boehm made a move to adopt amendment LC# 25.0770.02001

9:49 a.m. Senator Klein seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Jeff Barta	Y
Senator Keith Boehm	Y
Senator Mark Enget	Y
Senator Greg Kessel	A
Senator Jerry Klein	Y

Motion passed 4-0-1.

9:49 a.m. Senator Klein moved a Do Pass As Amended and Rerefer to Appropriations.

9:50 a.m. Senator Boehm seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Jeff Barta	Y
Senator Keith Boehm	Y
Senator Mark Enget	Y
Senator Greg Kessel	A
Senator Jerry Klein	Y

Senate Industry and Business Committee

SB 2200

2/3/25

Page 2

Motion passed 4-0-1.

Senator Barta will carry the bill.

9:51 a.m. Chairman Barta closed the hearing.

Audrey Oswald, Committee Clerk

February 3, 2025

RMT 2/3/25

1.0 FC

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

SENATE BILL NO. 2200

Introduced by

Senators Hogan, Axtman, Lee

Representatives Dobervich, Frelich

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 50-06 and chapter 57-40.7 of the
2 North Dakota Century Code, relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the
3 988 crisis stabilization fund and the imposition of a 988 access fee; to provide for a legislative
4 management report; and to provide an appropriation; to provide a continuing appropriation; and
5 to provide an effective date.

6 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

7 **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota Century Code is created
8 and enacted as follows:

9 **988 crisis stabilization fund - 988 crisis hotline program - Establishment - Continuing**
10 **appropriation.**

- 11 1. There is created in the state treasury a special fund known as the 988 crisis
12 stabilization fund. The fund consists of all moneys deposited in the fund under chapter
13 57-40.7 and through legislative appropriation. All money deposited in the fund is
14 appropriated as a continuing appropriation to the department for the purposes under
15 this section. The first fifty thousand dollars deposited into the 988 crisis stabilization
16 fund must be transferred to the general fund to reimburse the general fund for the
17 moneys used from the general fund to establish and implement the 988 crisis hotline.
18 2. The department shall establish and implement a 988 crisis hotline program to provide
19 crisis outreach, stabilization, and acute care to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.

The department may adopt rules in accordance with chapter 28-32 for the purpose of implementing this section.

3. In developing the program, the department shall:

a. Determine the rate of a 988 surcharge to be collected by providers of assessed communications services in an amount to be established annually by the department, but not to exceed thirty cents per month per communication connection. On or before October 1, 2025, and on or before October first of each year thereafter, the department shall notify the tax commissioner of the amount of the surcharge for the next calendar year. The amount of the surcharge must be calculated reasonably based on the cost of the services received by a service user. The amount of the surcharge imposed per 988 communication connection must be uniform, regardless of the technology used to provide the 988 communication connection.

b. Fund the 988 crisis hotline to provide intervention services and crisis care coordination to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.

e.b. Contract with crisis vendors to provide or administer crisis outreach, stabilization, acute care, and marketing for the 988 crisis hotline.

d.c. Contract with a nonprofit organization to operate the 988 crisis hotline and provide intervention services and crisis care coordination to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline from any jurisdiction within the state, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The nonprofit organization must:

(1) Have an active agreement with the administrator of the national suicide prevention lifeline for participation within the network;

(2) Meet the national suicide prevention lifeline requirements for serving high-risk and specialized populations; and

(3) Provide followup services to individuals accessing the 988 crisis hotline.

e.d. Collaborate with the national suicide prevention lifeline and the veterans crisis line for purposes of ensuring consistent public messaging about the 988 crisis hotline and available services.

4. For purposes of this section:

- 1 a. "988 crisis hotline" means a state-identified hotline participating in the national
2 suicide prevention and mental health crisis lifeline network to respond to
3 statewide or regional behavior health and substance use crisis calls.
4 b. "Communication connection" means a telephone access line, wireless access
5 line, unique voice over internet protocol service connection, or functional
6 equivalent uniquely identifiable by a number, internet address, or other
7 designation in which connections are enabled, configured, or capable of making
8 988 calls, texts, and chats.
9 c. "National suicide prevention lifeline" means a national network of local crisis
10 centers maintained by the federal substance abuse and mental health services
11 administration which provides free and confidential emotional support to people
12 in suicidal crisis, behavioral health crisis or emotional distress, twenty-four hours
13 a day, seven days a week.
14 d. "Service user" means a person that is provided a 988 communication connection
15 in the state.
16 e. "Veterans crisis line" means the veterans crisis line maintained by the Secretary
17 of Veterans Affairs under section 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code.
18 5. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton
19 misconduct, each provider of a communications service and its employees, agents,
20 suppliers, and subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting
21 directly or indirectly from the total or partial failure of any transmission to an
22 emergency communication service or for damages resulting from the performance of
23 installing, maintaining, or providing 988 service.
24 6. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton
25 misconduct, 988 crisis hotline agencies, employees, agents, suppliers, and
26 subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting directly or indirectly
27 for acts completed within the scope of an individual's employment responsibilities
28 including crisis stabilization services, outreach, de-escalation, stabilization, resource
29 connection, or followup support.

30 — **SECTION 2.** Chapter 57-40.7 of the North Dakota Century Code is created and enacted as
31 follows:

Rw
4.66

~~57-40.7-01. Definitions.~~

~~In this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:~~

~~1. "Assessed communications service" means a software service, communication connection, cable or broadband transport facilities, or a combination of these facilities, between a billed retail end user and a service provider's network that provides the end user, upon contacting 988, access to the dedicated 988 network. The term includes telephone exchange access service, wireless service, and voice over internet protocol service.~~

~~2. "Assessed communications service provider" means any person that provides telecommunications services under a license issued by the federal communications commission.~~

~~3. "Commissioner" means the tax commissioner.~~

~~4. "Communication connection" means a telephone access line, wireless access line, unique voice over internet protocol service connection, or functional equivalent uniquely identifiable by a number, internet address, or other designation in which connections are enabled, configured, or capable of making 988 calls, texts, and chats.~~

~~5. "Telephone access line" means the principal access to the telephone company's switched network, including an outward dialed trunk or access register.~~

~~6. "Voice over internet protocol service" means a service that enables real time two-way voice communications, requires a broadband connection from the user's location, requires internet protocol-compatible customer premises equipment, and permits users generally to receive calls that originate on the public switched telephone network and to terminate calls to the public switched telephone network.~~

~~7. "Wireless access line" means each active wireless and prepaid wireless telephone number assigned to a commercial mobile radio service subscriber, including end users of resellers, billed in the state.~~

~~8. "Wireless service" means commercial mobile radio service as defined in 47 U.S.C. 332(d)(1) and includes:~~

~~a. Services commonly referred to as wireless; and~~

~~b. Services provided by any wireless real time two-way voice communication device, including radio-telephone communications used in;~~

25
1 of 6

- ~~(1) Cellular telephone service;~~
- ~~(2) Personal communications service; or~~
- ~~(3) The functional or competitive equivalent of a radio telephone communications line used in cellular telephone service, personal communications service, or a network radio access line;~~

~~57-40.7-02. 988 fee imposed – Assessed communications services.~~

- ~~1. There is imposed a fee in the amount determined annually under section 1 of this Act per month per communication connection which must be applied equally upon all assessed communications services.~~
- ~~2. The commissioner shall provide notice of the 988 surcharge fee for the calendar year, as determined under section 1 of this Act, to assessed communication service providers on or before November first by posting the notice on the commissioner's website.~~
- ~~3. If the amount of the prepaid wireless emergency 988 fee imposed by this section is separately stated on an invoice, receipt, or other similar document provided to the consumer, the 988 fee may not be included in the base for measuring any other tax, fee, surcharge, or other charge imposed by this state, any political subdivision of the state, or any intergovernmental agency.~~
- ~~4. Prepaid wireless services are not subject to the fee imposed by this section.~~
- ~~5. The assessed communications service provider shall collect the fee from the subscriber or customer of the service.~~
- ~~6. For assessed communications service that involves a monthly billing, in the billing statement or invoice to the subscriber, the provider shall state the amount of the fee separately.~~
- ~~7. An assessed communications service provider is required to collect, report, and remit the 988 fee imposed under this section. An assessed communication service provider shall complete a monthly 988 surcharge fee return reporting the amount of the 988 fee for the period covered by the return, and any other information the commissioner may require. An assessed communication service provider shall file the return by electronic data interchange or other electronic media as determined by the commissioner. The~~

~~fee levied is due and payable on or before the last day of the month succeeding each monthly period.~~

~~8. An assessed communication service provider may deduct and retain one percent of the fee.~~

~~9. Chapter 57-39.2, pertaining to the administration of sales tax, not inconsistent with the provisions of this chapter, govern the administration of the 988 surcharge fee imposed in this chapter.~~

~~57-40.7-03. 988 fee fund collections - Deposit.~~

~~The commissioner shall remit quarterly the 988 fees collected under this chapter to the state treasurer for deposit in the 988 crisis stabilization fund.~~

SECTION 2. LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT REPORT - CRISIS STABILIZATION FUND.

During the 2025-26 interim the tax department of health and human services shall provide an annual report to the legislative management on the balance of the 988 crisis stabilization fund.

The report must include information regarding the growth and balance of the fund; and any recommendations, if any, for adjusting the fee rate; and any other findings, recommendations, or conclusions the tax department deems necessary.

SECTION 3. APPROPRIATION. There is appropriated out of any moneys in the general fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of ~~\$50,000~~ \$500,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the department of health and human services for the purpose of establishing and implementing a 988 crisis hotline program, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

~~**SECTION 5. EFFECTIVE DATE.** Section 2 of this Act is effective for taxable periods beginning after December 31, 2025.~~

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
SB 2200**

Industry and Business Committee (Sen. Barta, Chairman) recommends **AMENDMENTS** ([25.0770.02001](#)) and when so amended, recommends **DO PASS** and **BE REREFERRED** to the **Appropriations Committee** (4 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). SB 2200 was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.

2025 SENATE APPROPRIATIONS

SB 2200

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee Harvest Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
2/6/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund; to provide for a legislative management report; and to provide an appropriation.

3:03 p.m. Chairman Bekkedahl opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Bekkedahl, Vice-Chairman Erbele, and Senators Burckhard, Cleary, Conley, Davison, Dever, Dwyer, Magrum, Mathern, Meyer, Schaible, Sickler, Sorvaag, Thomas, Wanzek.

Discussion Topics:

- Amendment Changes
- Fees
- 211 and 988 Crisis Hotline Differences

3:04 p.m. Chairman Bekkedahl opened discussion.

3:09 p.m. Chairman Bekkedahl adjourned the meeting.

Elizabeth Reiten, Committee Clerk

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee Harvest Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
2/10/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund; to provide for a legislative management report; and to provide an appropriation.

8:31 a.m. Chairman Bekkedahl called the meeting to order.

Members Present: Chairman Bekkedahl, Vice-Chairman Erbele, and Senators Burckhard, Cleary, Conley, Davison, Dever, Dwyer, Magrum, Mathern, Meyer, Schaible, Sickler, Sorvaag, Thomas, Wanzek.

Discussion Topics:

- ND Suicide Statistics
- 988 Call Center Challenges
- 988 and 211 Services

8:32 a.m. Senator Hogan testified in favor and submitted testimony #36559.

8:55 a.m. Senator Davison moved to amend by changing the funding source for the \$500,000 to the community health trust fund.

8:55 a.m. Senator Mathern seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Robert Erbele	Y
Senator Randy A. Burckhard	Y
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Cole Conley	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	Y
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	Y
Senator Jeffery J. Magrum	Y
Senator Tim Mathern	Y
Senator Scott Meyer	Y
Senator Donald Schaible	Y
Senator Jonathan Sickler	Y
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	Y
Senator Paul J. Thomas	Y
Senator Terry M. Wanzek	Y

Motion Passed 16-0-0.

8:55 a.m. Senator Davison moved a Do Pass as Amended.

8:55 a.m. Senator Mathern seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Brad Bekkedahl	Y
Senator Robert Erbele	Y
Senator Randy A. Burckhard	Y
Senator Sean Cleary	Y
Senator Cole Conley	Y
Senator Kyle Davison	Y
Senator Dick Dever	Y
Senator Michael Dwyer	Y
Senator Jeffery J. Magrum	Y
Senator Tim Mathern	Y
Senator Scott Meyer	Y
Senator Donald Schaible	Y
Senator Jonathan Sickler	Y
Senator Ronald Sorvaag	Y
Senator Paul J. Thomas	Y
Senator Terry M. Wanzek	Y

Motion Passed 16-0-0.

Senator Davison will carry the bill.

8:57 a.m. Chairman Bekkedahl closed the hearing.

Elizabeth Reiten, Committee Clerk

February 10, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO
FIRST ENGROSSMENT**

ENGROSSED SENATE BILL NO. 2200

Introduced by

Senators Hogan, Axtman, Lee

Representatives Dobervich, Frelich

2-11-25
J3 1083

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota
2 Century Code, relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis
3 stabilization fund; to provide for a legislative management report; and to provide an
4 appropriation.

5 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

6 **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota Century Code is created
7 and enacted as follows:

8 **988 crisis stabilization fund - 988 crisis hotline program - Establishment.**

- 9 1. There is created in the state treasury a special fund known as the 988 crisis
10 stabilization fund. The fund consists of all moneys deposited through legislative
11 appropriation.
- 12 2. The department shall establish and implement a 988 crisis hotline program to provide
13 crisis outreach, stabilization, and acute care to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.
14 The department may adopt rules in accordance with chapter 28-32 for the purpose of
15 implementing this section.
- 16 3. In developing the program, the department shall:
- 17 a. Fund the 988 crisis hotline to provide intervention services and crisis care
18 coordination to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.
- 19 b. Contract with crisis vendors to provide or administer crisis outreach, stabilization,
20 acute care, and marketing for the 988 crisis hotline.

Aug 2003

- 1 c. Contract with a nonprofit organization to operate the 988 crisis hotline and
2 provide intervention services and crisis care coordination to individuals calling the
3 988 crisis hotline from any jurisdiction within the state, twenty-four hours a day,
4 seven days a week. The nonprofit organization must:
5 (1) Have an active agreement with the administrator of the national suicide
6 prevention lifeline for participation within the network;
7 (2) Meet the national suicide prevention lifeline requirements for serving
8 high-risk and specialized populations; and
9 (3) Provide followup services to individuals accessing the 988 crisis hotline.
10 d. Collaborate with the national suicide prevention lifeline and the veterans crisis
11 line for purposes of ensuring consistent public messaging about the 988 crisis
12 hotline and available services.
13 4. For purposes of this section:
14 a. "988 crisis hotline" means a state-identified hotline participating in the national
15 suicide prevention and mental health crisis lifeline network to respond to
16 statewide or regional behavior health and substance use crisis calls.
17 b. "National suicide prevention lifeline" means a national network of local crisis
18 centers maintained by the federal substance abuse and mental health services
19 administration which provides free and confidential emotional support to people
20 in suicidal crisis, behavioral health crisis or emotional distress, twenty-four hours
21 a day, seven days a week.
22 c. "Service user" means a person that is provided a 988 communication connection
23 in the state.
24 d. "Veterans crisis line" means the veterans crisis line maintained by the Secretary
25 of Veterans Affairs under section 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code.
26 5. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton
27 misconduct, each provider of a communications service and its employees, agents,
28 suppliers, and subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting
29 directly or indirectly from the total or partial failure of any transmission to an
30 emergency communication service or for damages resulting from the performance of
31 installing, maintaining, or providing 988 service.

1 6. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton
2 misconduct, 988 crisis hotline agencies, employees, agents, suppliers, and
3 subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting directly or indirectly
4 for acts completed within the scope of an individual's employment responsibilities
5 including crisis stabilization services, outreach, de-escalation, stabilization, resource
6 connection, or followup support.

7 **SECTION 2. LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT REPORT - CRISIS STABILIZATION FUND.**

8 During the 2025-26 interim the department of health and human services shall provide an
9 annual report to the legislative management on the balance of the 988 crisis stabilization fund.
10 The report must include information regarding the growth and balance of the fund and any
11 recommendations, findings, or conclusions the department deems necessary.

12 **SECTION 3. APPROPRIATION.** There is appropriated out of any moneys in the
13 ~~general~~community health trust fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of
14 \$500,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the department of health and human
15 services for the purpose of establishing and implementing a 988 crisis hotline program, for the
16 biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
ENGROSSED SB 2200**

Appropriations Committee (Sen. Bekkedahl, Chairman) recommends **AMENDMENTS** ([25.0770.03001](#)) and when so amended, recommends **DO PASS** (16 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). SB 2200 was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.

Testimony
SB 2200
February 10, 2025
Senator Kathy Hogan

Chairman Bekkedahl and members of the Appropriations Committee, for the record, my name is Kathy Hogan, I represent District 21 which is central Fargo and a portion of West Fargo.

Senate Bill 2200 was introduced to provide a long-term funding stream for 988 Suicide Prevention Intervention services by establishing a crisis stabilization fund based on up to a 30 cents fee on cell phones like the fees that fund the 911 emergency response structure. The original fiscal note estimated income would be generate \$4.4 million with a \$50,000 cost to set up the fund.

There are devastating impacts of suicide in North Dakota:

- North Dakota has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation, with a rate of 19.3 deaths per 100,000 people, exceeding the national average (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2024).
- In 2022, 143 North Dakotans died by suicide, marking a 33% increase over the past two decades (CDC WONDER, 2023).
- Suicide is the 8th leading cause of death in North Dakota and the 2nd leading cause of death among youth and young adults (ages 10-34) (AFSP, 2024).
- In rural areas, limited access to mental health care contributes to higher suicide rates, making crisis services like FirstLink even more critical.

The Finance and Tax Committee amended the cell fee structures from the bill, but recognized the challenges facing the 988 call center and, therefore, recommended this bill be passed without a funding stream for an additional \$500,000. In the Governor's proposed budget, it calls for \$2,043,330 in funding for 988 services. If this bill were passed, it would increase the reimbursement from 45% of costs to 50% of operational costs. The ND Department of Health Human Services has also expanded crisis response structures through training for law enforcement, the development of the Mental Health Registry and Psychiatric Bed Management system. With the new Certified Behavioral Health Centers, additional resources will be needed, particularly in rural communities.

Another bill SB 2281 also considered by the Finance and Tax Committee increased tobacco taxes by 25 cents/pack and extended that tax rate to electronic cigarettes. This was a very modest tax increase. We would still have the fourth lowest tax rate on tobacco products in the nation: \$.40 cents lower than SD, \$1.01 lower than Montana and \$2.35 lower than Minnesota. That bill is still in committee, but I reference that bill because it designated this increased tax rate to be spent both on 988 Suicide Prevention Intervention and local public health units. It was the intention of SB 2281 to first stabilize the funding for the 988 call center and then build out the local community response infrastructure so that when there is a crisis, local services are available.

FirstLink, the provider of the 988 call response structures, currently is facing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining staff because 80% of their costs are personnel related. We do not expect 911 providers to have to host fundraisers or write grants simply to maintain their basic infrastructure. 988 and mental health needs equitable funding. I hope you support SB 2281 which could build a long-term crisis response, but I hope you can support SB 2200 as a first step.

Finally, the numbers of people seeking help continue to grow. It is truly sad if we as a state are unable to respond to those cries for help. Please support this bill and SB 2281 so that we stabilize our crisis systems to respond to those asking for assistance.

Thank you for your consideration, I am more than willing to answer any questions.

First Link 2025 annual budget.

Equipment Maintenance Supp	1,000
Postage	1,800
Postage Meter Rental	2,200
Employee Recruitment Fees	5,000
Copier Lease	5,500
Training Seminars	7,000
Travel	7,500
Dues - Organizational Mem	11,000
Simple IRA Employer Exp	12,500
Required General Liability	15,000
Technology	50,000
Office Supplies	27,350
Education Awareness	11,000
Telephone/Internet/Technology	71,600
Program Expense	79,000
Professional Fees; bookkeeping, HR, technology management fees	103,500
Office Rent	161,000
Medical Plan Premiums	165,000
Payroll Taxes Expense	175,000
Payroll	1,917,057
TOTAL EXPENSE	2,829,007.00

2025 HOUSE HUMAN SERVICES

SB 2200

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Human Services Committee Pioneer Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
3/18/2025

Relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund; to provide for a legislative management report; and to provide an appropriation.

9:00 a.m. Chairman M. Ruby opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman M. Ruby, Vice-Chairman Frelich, Representatives K. Anderson, Beltz, Bolinske, Davis, Dobervich, Fegley, Holle, Kiefert, Rios, Rohr
Members Absent: Representative Hendrix

Discussion Topics:

- Permanent funding for crisis response continuum
- Crisis response
- Crisis Stabilization

9:03 a.m. Senator Hogan, District 21, introduced the bill and submitted testimony, #42771, #42772.

9:24 a.m. Madison Hanson, Policy Advocate for National Alliance on Mental Illness, testified in favor.

Additional written testimony:

Mark Jorritsma, Executive Director of North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action, submitted testimony in favor, #41824.

Carter Gill, Vice President of Governmental Affairs of the North Dakota Student Association, submitted testimony in favor, #42108.

Jennifer Illich, Executive Director of FirstLink, submitted testimony in favor, #42605.

9:27 a.m. Chairman M. Ruby closed the hearing.

Jackson Toman, Committee Clerk



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 2200

Mark Jorritsma, Executive Director
North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action
March 18, 2025

Dear Chairman Ruby and honorable members of the House Human Services Committee,

My name is Mark Jorritsma and I am the Executive Director of North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action. I am testifying on behalf of our organization in support of Senate Bill 2200 and respectfully request that you render a "DO PASS" on this bill.

SB 2200 would support funding for a 988 crisis hotline focused on suicide prevention and responding to mental health crises. Our organization recognizes that mental health and suicide prevention through mechanisms like a hotline are important, however, we would assert that this hotline is not simply just important, it is *critical* for North Dakota.

Using the most recent official data available, North Dakota is the state with the 5th highest suicide rate in the nation¹. The story is just as bad when we look at alcohol abuse. North Dakota is current ranked #1 in DUI rates, and it has the 5th highest alcohol consumption per capita in the country.² We have significant issues and solving them is complex and generally takes long-term solutions. While that may be true, what must we do to address more urgent specific situations?

If an individual has a dangerous mental break with reality, attempts suicide, or is trying to deal with a similar life-threatening crisis, no long-term solution will help them in that moment. They need immediate urgent intervention, and that is what the 988 hotline can provide.

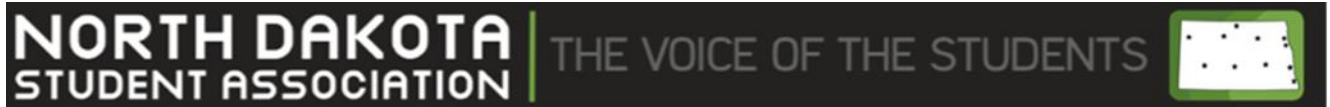
Speaking personally, my wife's and my own extended families and friends have had to deal with individuals who have committed suicide, have significant mental health issues, and fight daily with substance abuse problems. I doubt that our families are dramatic outliers in this respect. This is not an abstract problem, it's real and needs to be addressed.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/suicide-mortality/suicide.htm>

² <https://quotewizard.com/news/americas-booziest-states>

There is ample evidence that crisis hotlines can greatly improve outcomes addressing these issues in urgent situations, and they can also serve as an entry point to more long-lasting care. For these reasons, North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action requests that you render a “DO PASS” on Senate Bill 2200. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, and feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Mark Jorritsma
Executive Director
North Dakota Family Alliance Legislative Action

**SB 2200**

January 23, 2025

Carter Gill, North Dakota Student Association

(701) 388-7589 | carter.gill@ndus.edu

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.

Dear Chairman Ruby and Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Jennifer Illich, and I serve as the Executive Director of FirstLink. I am here today to express my strong support for **SB 2200** and to emphasize the critical need for sustained funding for the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** in North Dakota.

At FirstLink, we proudly answer the **988 Lifeline 24/7/365**, providing **immediate crisis intervention** and connecting individuals with the **resources they need** to navigate difficult moments. Our mission is to ensure **no one faces a crisis alone**.

The Return on Investment: Saving Lives and Resources

988 centers like FirstLink provide a cost-effective and life-saving solution for behavioral health crises. Every day, we **prevent suicides** and ensure individuals receive the support necessary to stay alive. While the value of a saved life is immeasurable, research estimates that each suicide death costs approximately **\$1.5 million** in medical expenses, lost productivity, and emotional toll on families and communities.

In 2024 alone, **112 North Dakotans survived suicide attempts after calling 988**, equating to an estimated **\$168 million in economic savings**.

Additionally, our **collaboration with 911 centers** significantly reduces the burden on emergency services. In the past year:

- **14,190 crises were de-escalated without first responder intervention**—saving valuable emergency resources.
- The average cost of an ambulance response is **\$1,500**, meaning our crisis interventions resulted in an estimated **\$21.3 million in savings**—not including further healthcare expenses that would have followed.

Research consistently demonstrates that strong partnerships between **988 and 911** reduce emergency response strain while providing **more effective, compassionate care** for individuals in crisis.

Beyond Crisis Intervention: Sustained Support for Recovery

FirstLink doesn't stop at crisis response. Through our **Care and Support Program**, we provide follow-up services for individuals admitted due to suicide attempts or overdoses. **These services help maintain stability, reduce hospital readmissions, and lower long-term healthcare costs.**

Studies show that individuals receiving follow-up support are **significantly less likely** to experience a repeat crisis. Our follow-up efforts include:

- **Regular check-ins**
- **Resource coordination**
- **Emotional support** to keep individuals engaged with appropriate care services

Follow-up interventions are also highly **cost-effective**. Research from the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (2021)** suggests that for every **\$1 invested** in follow-up care, there is a return of **\$1.76 to \$2.43** due to reduced hospitalizations and emergency care.

Critical Need for Expansion

Over the past year, **demand for FirstLink's services has grown significantly**, with call, chat, and text volumes increasing—along with the severity of crises requiring longer intervention times. To meet this need and continue saving lives, FirstLink requires:

- **8 additional full-time crisis counselors in 2025**
- **Expanded office space** to accommodate a growing response team
- **Technology investments** to improve communication, security, and crisis management
- **Funding for operational costs**, including essential software and communication platforms

A Call to Action: Vote Yes on SB 2200

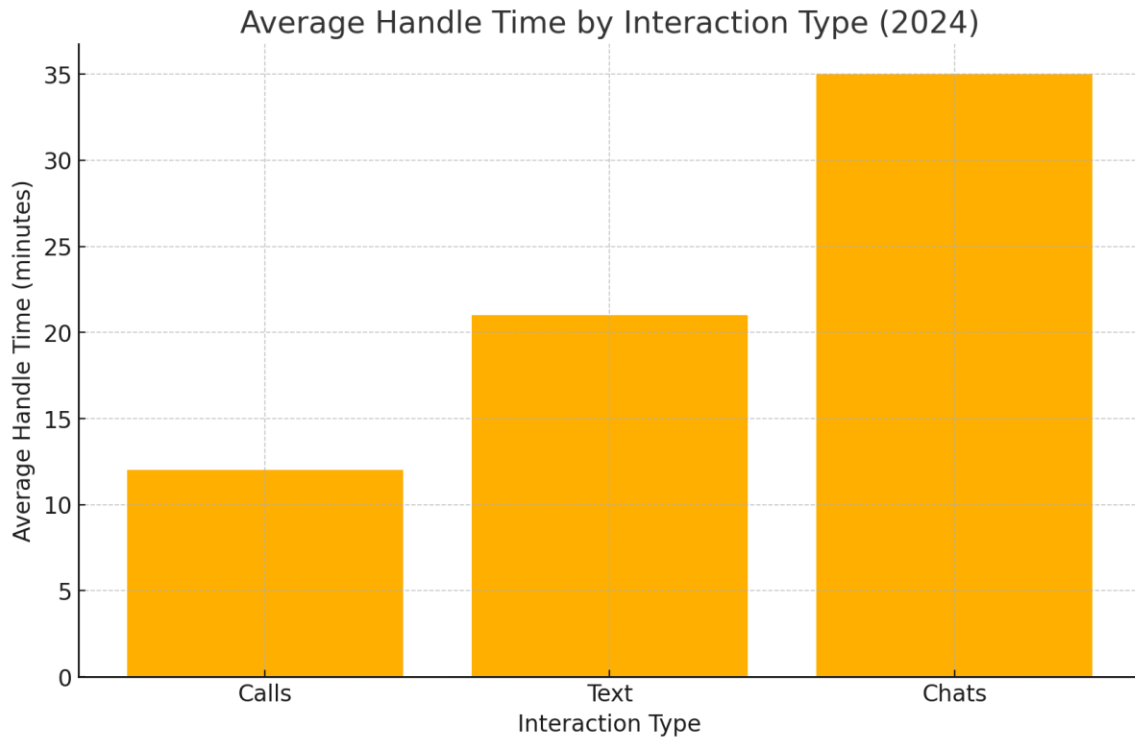
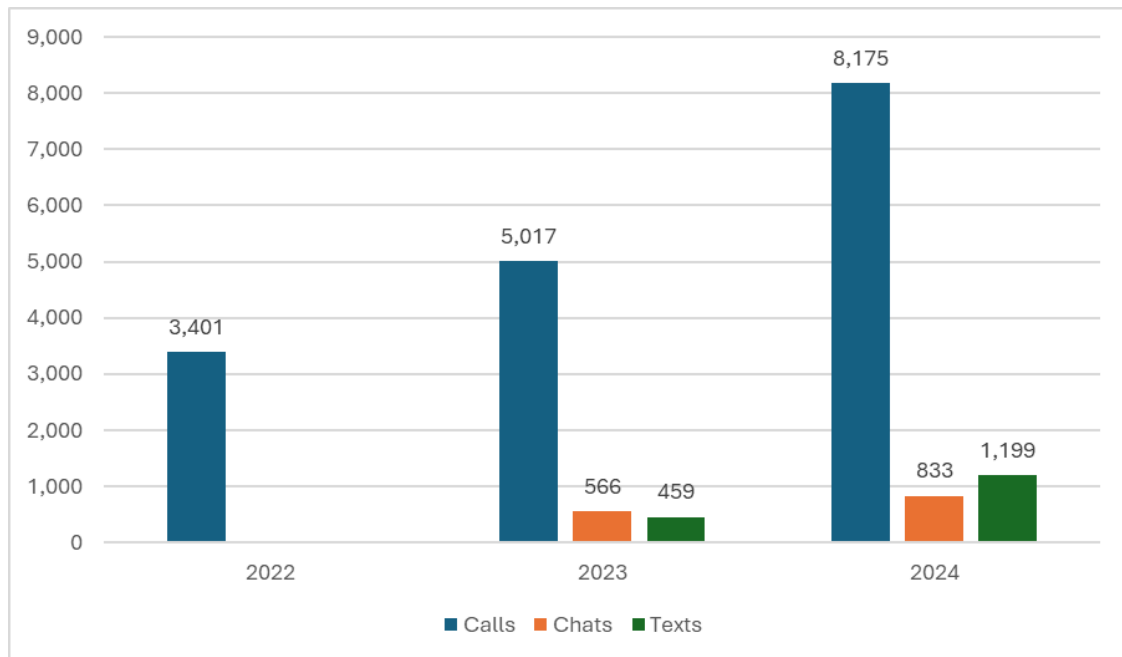
To sustain and expand these **life-saving services**, we urge you to **vote YES on SB 2200**. This bill will provide the necessary funding to ensure that North Dakotans in crisis **continue to receive immediate, expert care when they need it most**.

Your support will allow FirstLink to **save more lives, reduce emergency response costs, and provide long-term assistance** to those in need.

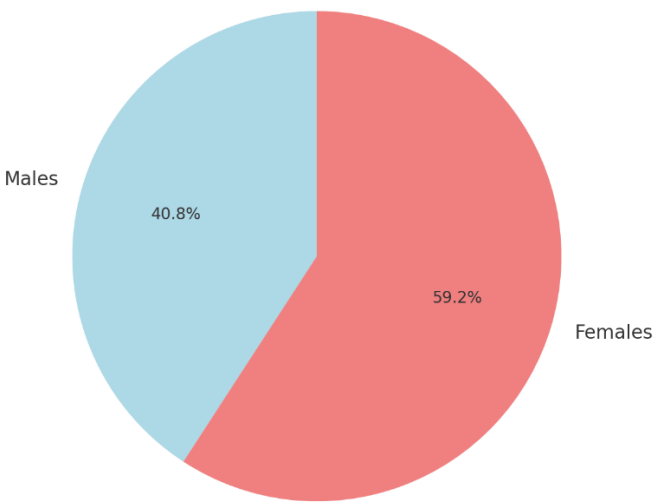
Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

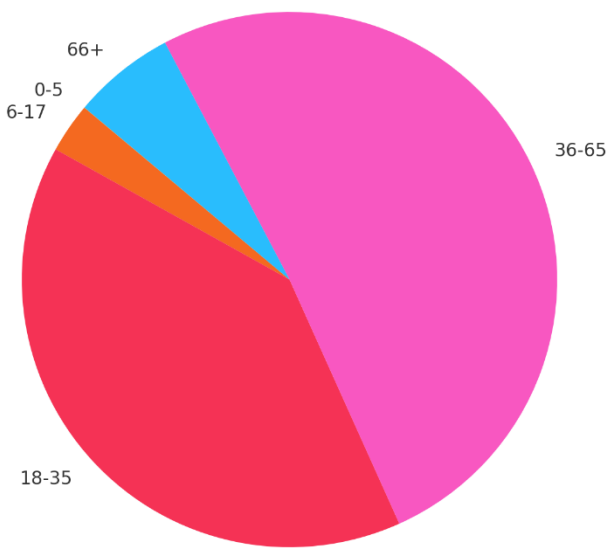
Jennifer Illich
Executive Director
FirstLink



Percentage of Males and Females in 2024

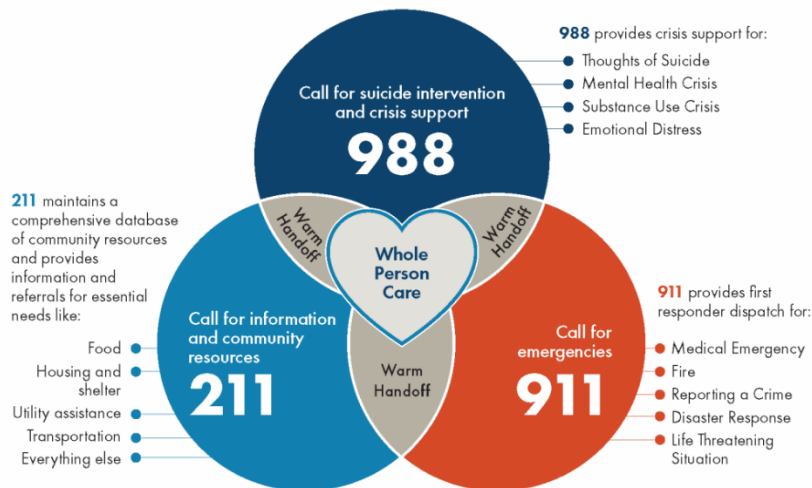


Age Distribution (2024)



Add 8 Full-Time Equivalent Staff to Team FirstLink	
Description	Annual Expense (\$)
Medical Plan Premiums	76,800
office rent and cam fees	58,100
Payroll	420,000
Payroll Taxes Expense	45,100
Total	600,000

Help is **3** Numbers Away



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.

Policy Recommendations

To reimagine the mental health crisis response system, NAMI encourages states to:

Establish a permanent funding source for the full crisis response continuum (988 call centers, mobile crisis response and crisis stabilization options) through monthly telecommunications fees and related appropriations

Create or expand local mobile crisis teams and crisis stabilization options

Enact policies to minimize police involvement and reduce use of force incidents in mental health emergencies

Improve insurance coverage of mobile crisis team and crisis stabilization services

Require ongoing evaluation of the state's crisis care system and gaps to inform next steps

REIMAGINE

Crisis Response

States with a 988 Fee

	988 Fee Amount	Estimated Annual Revenue (in Millions)	Effective Date (on or after)
 California	\$0.08-\$0.30 per line per month	\$55.6	\$0.08 charge began on Jan. 1, 2023. Starting Jan. 1, 2025, the fee will be charged at an amount based on a specified formula, but no greater than \$0.30
 Colorado	Capped at \$0.30 per line per month	\$ 12.7	\$0.18 charge began Jan. 1, 2022
 Delaware	\$0.60 per line per month	\$9.4	Jan. 16, 2024
 Maryland*	\$0.25 per line per month	\$27	Oct. 1, 2024
 Minnesota	Capped at \$0.25 per line per month	\$9.8	\$0.12 charge begins Sept. 1, 2024
 Nevada	\$0.35 per line per month	\$13.3	Jan. 20, 2023
 Oregon	\$0.40 per line per month	\$32.9	Jan. 1, 2024 (sunsets Jan. 1, 2030)
 Virginia	\$0.12 per line per month	\$10	July 1, 2021
 Vermont*	A portion of \$0.72 per line per month	\$1	July 1, 2025
 Washington	\$0.40 per line per month	\$46	Jan. 1, 2023

* Maryland and Vermont enacted 988 fee legislation in 2024.

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Human Services Committee Pioneer Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
3/31/2025

Relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund; to provide for a legislative management report; and to provide an appropriation.

4:47 p.m. Chairman M. Ruby opened the meeting.

Members Present: Chairman M. Ruby, Vice Chairman Frelich, Representatives K. Anderson, Beltz, Bolinske, Davis, Dobervich, Fegley, Hendrix, Holle, Kiefert, Rios, Rohr

Discussion Topics:

- Hotline fees

4:48 p.m. Chairman M. Ruby introduced amendments LC#25.0770.04001 #44498.

4:53 p.m. Representative Holle moved to adopt the LC#25.0770.04003 amendment.

4:58 p.m. Vice Chairman Frelich seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Matthew Ruby	Y
Representative Kathy Frelich	Y
Representative Karen Anderson	Y
Representative Mike Beltz	Y
Representative Macy Bolinske	Y
Representative Jayme Davis	Y
Representative Gretchen Dobervich	Y
Representative Cleyton Fegley	Y
Representative Jared Hendrix	Y
Representative Dawson Holle	Y
Representative Dwight Kiefert	Y
Representative Nico Rios	Y
Representative Karen Rohr	Y

5:01 p.m. Motion passed 13-0-0.

5:01 p.m. Vice Chairman Frelich moved a Do Pass as amended and rereferred to appropriations.

5:01 p.m. Representative Holle seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Matthew Ruby	Y
Representative Kathy Frelich	Y

Representative Karen Anderson	Y
Representative Mike Beltz	Y
Representative Macy Bolinske	Y
Representative Jayme Davis	Y
Representative Gretchen Dobervich	Y
Representative Cleyton Fegley	Y
Representative Jared Hendrix	Y
Representative Dawson Holle	Y
Representative Dwight Kiefert	Y
Representative Nico Rios	Y
Representative Karen Rohr	Y

5:03 p.m. Motion passed 13-0-0.

Vice Chairman Frelich will carry the bill.

5:04 p.m. Chairman M. Ruby adjourned the meeting.

Jackson Toman, Committee Clerk

March 31, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO
SECOND ENGROSSMENT**

VG 3/31/25
1 of 6

REENGROSSED SENATE BILL NO. 2200

Introduced by

Senators Hogan, Axtman, Lee

Representatives Dobervich, Frelich

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 50-06 and chapter 57-40.7 of the
2 North Dakota Century Code, relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the
3 988 crisis stabilization fund and the imposition of a 988 access fee; to provide for a legislative
4 management report; ~~and to provide an appropriation; to provide a continuing appropriation; and~~
5 to provide an effective date.

6 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

7 **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota Century Code is created
8 and enacted as follows:

9 **988 crisis stabilization fund - 988 crisis hotline program - Establishment - Continuing**
10 **appropriation.**

- 11 1. There is created in the state treasury a special fund known as the 988 crisis
12 stabilization fund. The fund consists of all moneys deposited in the fund under chapter
13 57-40.7 and through legislative appropriation. All money deposited in the fund is
14 appropriated as a continuing appropriation to the department for the purposes under
15 this section. The first fifty thousand dollars deposited into the 988 crisis stabilization
16 fund must be transferred to the general fund to reimburse the general fund for the
17 moneys used from the general fund to establish and implement the 988 crisis hotline.
18 2. The department shall establish and implement a 988 crisis hotline program to provide
19 crisis outreach, stabilization, and acute care to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.

1 The department may adopt rules in accordance with chapter 28-32 for the purpose of
2 implementing this section.

3 3. In developing the program, the department shall:

4 a. Determine the rate of a 988 surcharge to be collected by providers of assessed
5 communications services in an amount to be established annually by the
6 department, but not to exceed five cents per month per communication
7 connection. On or before October 1, 2025, and on or before October first of each
8 year thereafter, the department shall notify the tax commissioner of the amount of
9 the surcharge for the next calendar year. The amount of the surcharge must be
10 calculated reasonably based on the cost of the services received by a service
11 user. The amount of the surcharge imposed per 988 communication connection
12 must be uniform, regardless of the technology used to provide the
13 988 communication connection.

14 b. Fund the 988 crisis hotline to provide intervention services and crisis care
15 coordination to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.

16 ~~b. Contract with crisis vendors to provide or administer crisis outreach, stabilization,~~
17 ~~acute care, and marketing for the 988 crisis hotline.~~

18 c. Contract with a nonprofit organization to operate the 988 crisis hotline and
19 provide intervention services and crisis care coordination to individuals calling the
20 988 crisis hotline from any jurisdiction within the state, twenty-four hours a day,
21 seven days a week. The nonprofit organization must:

22 (1) Have an active agreement with the administrator of the national suicide
23 prevention lifeline for participation within the network;

24 (2) Meet the national suicide prevention lifeline requirements for serving
25 high-risk and specialized populations; and

26 (3) Provide followup services to individuals accessing the 988 crisis hotline.

27 d. Collaborate with the national suicide prevention lifeline and the veterans crisis
28 line for purposes of ensuring consistent public messaging about the 988 crisis
29 hotline and available services.

30 4. For purposes of this section:

- 1 a. "988 crisis hotline" means a state-identified hotline participating in the national
2 suicide prevention and mental health crisis lifeline network to respond to
3 statewide or regional behavior health and substance use crisis calls.
- 4 b. "Communication connection" means a telephone access line, wireless access
5 line, unique voice over internet protocol service connection, or functional
6 equivalent uniquely identifiable by a number, internet address, or other
7 designation in which connections are enabled, configured, or capable of making
8 988 calls, texts, and chats.
- 9 c. "National suicide prevention lifeline" means a national network of local crisis
10 centers maintained by the federal substance abuse and mental health services
11 administration which provides free and confidential emotional support to people
12 in suicidal crisis, behavioral health crisis or emotional distress, twenty-four hours
13 a day, seven days a week.
- 14 ~~e.d.~~ "Service user" means a person that is provided a 988 communication connection
15 in the state.
- 16 ~~d.e.~~ "Veterans crisis line" means the veterans crisis line maintained by the Secretary
17 of Veterans Affairs under section 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code.
- 18 5. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton
19 misconduct, each provider of a communications service and its employees, agents,
20 suppliers, and subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting
21 directly or indirectly from the total or partial failure of any transmission to an
22 emergency communication service or for damages resulting from the performance of
23 installing, maintaining, or providing 988 service.
- 24 6. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton
25 misconduct, 988 crisis hotline agencies, employees, agents, suppliers, and
26 subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting directly or indirectly
27 for acts completed within the scope of an individual's employment responsibilities
28 including crisis stabilization services, outreach, de-escalation, stabilization, resource
29 connection, or followup support.

30 **SECTION 2.** Chapter 57-40.7 of the North Dakota Century Code is created and enacted as
31 follows:

57-40.7-01. Definitions.

In this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:

1. "Assessed communications service" means a software service, communication connection, cable or broadband transport facilities, or a combination of these facilities, between a billed retail end user and a service provider's network, which provides the end user, upon contacting 988, access to the dedicated 988 network. The term includes a telephone exchange access service, wireless service, and voice over internet protocol service.
2. "Assessed communications service provider" means any person that provides telecommunications services under a license issued by the federal communications commission.
3. "Commissioner" means the tax commissioner.
4. "Communication connection" means a telephone access line, wireless access line, unique voice over internet protocol service connection, or functional equivalent uniquely identifiable by a number, internet address, or other designation in which connections are enabled, configured, or capable of making 988 calls, texts, and chats.
5. "Telephone access line" means the principal access to the telephone company's switched network, including an outward dialed trunk or access register.
6. "Voice over internet protocol service" means a service that enables real-time two-way voice communications, requires a broadband connection from the user's location, requires internet protocol-compatible customer premises equipment, and permits users generally to receive calls that originate on the public switched telephone network and to terminate calls to the public switched telephone network.
7. "Wireless access line" means each active wireless and prepaid wireless telephone number assigned to a commercial mobile radio service subscriber, including end users of resellers, billed in the state.
8. "Wireless service" means commercial mobile radio service as defined in 47 U.S.C. 332(d)(1) and includes:
 - a. Services commonly referred to as wireless; and
 - b. Services provided by any wireless real-time two-way voice communication device, including radio-telephone communications used in:

(1) Cellular telephone service;

(2) Personal communications service; or

(3) The functional or competitive equivalent of a radio-telephone communications line used in cellular telephone service, personal communications service, or a network radio access line.

57-40.7-02. 988 fee imposed - Assessed communications services.

1. There is imposed a fee in the amount determined annually under section 1 of this Act per month per communication connection which must be applied equally upon all assessed communications services.

2. The commissioner shall provide notice of the 988 surcharge fee for the calendar year, as determined under section 1 of this Act, to assessed communication service providers on or before November first by posting the notice on the commissioner's website.

3. If the amount of the prepaid wireless emergency 988 fee imposed by this section is separately stated on an invoice, receipt, or other similar document provided to the consumer, the 988 fee may not be included in the base for measuring any other tax, fee, surcharge, or other charge imposed by this state, any political subdivision of the state, or any intergovernmental agency. A political subdivision of the state may not charge an additional 988 fee.

4. Prepaid wireless services are not subject to the fee imposed by this section.

5. The assessed communications service provider shall collect the fee from the subscriber or customer of the service.

6. For assessed communications service that involves a monthly billing, in the billing statement or invoice to the subscriber, the provider shall state the amount of the fee separately.

7. An assessed communications service provider is required to collect, report, and remit the 988 fee imposed under this section. An assessed communication service provider shall complete a monthly 988 surcharge fee return reporting the amount of the 988 fee for the period covered by the return, and any other information the commissioner may require. An assessed communication service provider shall file the return by electronic data interchange or other electronic media as determined by the commissioner. The

1 fee levied is due and payable on or before the last day of the month succeeding each
2 monthly period.

3 8. An assessed communication service provider may deduct and retain one percent of
4 the fee.

5 9. The provisions of chapter 57-39.2 pertaining to the administration of sales tax, not
6 inconsistent with the provisions of this chapter, govern the administration of the 988
7 surcharge fee imposed in this chapter.

8 **57-40.7-03. 988 fee fund collections - Deposit.**

9 The commissioner shall remit quarterly the 988 fees collected under this chapter to the
10 state treasurer for deposit in the 988 crisis stabilization fund.

11 **SECTION 3. LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT REPORT - CRISIS STABILIZATION FUND.**

12 During the 2025-26 interim the department of health and human services shall provide an
13 annual report to the legislative management on the balance of the 988 crisis stabilization fund.
14 The report must include information regarding the growth and balance of the fund and any
15 recommendations, findings, or conclusions the department deems necessary.

16 **SECTION 4. APPROPRIATION - DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES -**

17 **988 CRISIS HOTLINE PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION.** There is appropriated out of any
18 moneys in the community health trust fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the
19 sum of ~~\$500,000~~\$50,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the department of
20 health and human services for the purpose of establishing and implementing a 988 crisis hotline
21 program, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

22 **SECTION 5. EFFECTIVE DATE.** Section 2 of this Act is effective for taxable periods
23 beginning after December 31, 2025.

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
REENGROSSED AND AMENDED SB 2200**

Human Services Committee (Rep. M. Ruby, Chairman) recommends **AMENDMENTS** ([25.0770.04003](#)) and when so amended, recommends **DO PASS** and **BE REREFERRED** to the **Appropriations Committee** (13 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). Reengrossed SB 2200, as amended, was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar.

25.0770.04001
Title.

Prepared by the Legislative Council
staff for Representative M. Ruby
March 25, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO SECOND ENGROSSMENT

REENGROSSED SENATE BILL NO. 2200

Introduced by

Senators Hogan, Axtman, Lee

Representatives Dobervich, Frelich

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 50-06 and chapter 57-40.7 of the
2 North Dakota Century Code, relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the
3 988 crisis stabilization fund and the imposition of a 988 access fee; to provide for a legislative
4 management report; ~~and~~ to provide an appropriation; to provide a continuing appropriation; and
5 to provide an effective date.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:

7 **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota Century Code is created
8 and enacted as follows:

9 **988 crisis stabilization fund - 988 crisis hotline program - Establishment - Continuing**
10 **appropriation.**

- 11 1. There is created in the state treasury a special fund known as the 988 crisis
12 stabilization fund. The fund consists of all moneys deposited in the fund under chapter
13 57-40.7 and through legislative appropriation. All money deposited in the fund is
14 appropriated as a continuing appropriation to the department for the purposes under
15 this section. The first fifty thousand dollars deposited into the 988 crisis stabilization
16 fund must be transferred to the general fund to reimburse the general fund for the
17 moneys used from the general fund to establish and implement the 988 crisis hotline.
- 18 2. The department shall establish and implement a 988 crisis hotline program to provide
19 crisis outreach, stabilization, and acute care to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.

1 The department may adopt rules in accordance with chapter 28-32 for the purpose of
2 implementing this section.

3 3. In developing the program, the department shall:

4 a. Determine the rate of a 988 surcharge to be collected by providers of assessed
5 communications services in an amount to be established annually by the
6 department, but not to exceed fifteen cents per month per communication
7 connection. On or before October 1, 2025, and on or before October first of each
8 year thereafter, the department shall notify the tax commissioner of the amount of
9 the surcharge for the next calendar year. The amount of the surcharge must be
10 calculated reasonably based on the cost of the services received by a service
11 user. The amount of the surcharge imposed per 988 communication connection
12 must be uniform, regardless of the technology used to provide the
13 988 communication connection.

14 b. Fund the 988 crisis hotline to provide intervention services and crisis care
15 coordination to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.

16 ~~b. Contract with crisis vendors to provide or administer crisis outreach, stabilization,~~
17 ~~acute care, and marketing for the 988 crisis hotline.~~

18 c. Contract with a nonprofit organization to operate the 988 crisis hotline and
19 provide intervention services and crisis care coordination to individuals calling the
20 988 crisis hotline from any jurisdiction within the state, twenty-four hours a day,
21 seven days a week. The nonprofit organization must:

22 (1) Have an active agreement with the administrator of the national suicide
23 prevention lifeline for participation within the network;

24 (2) Meet the national suicide prevention lifeline requirements for serving
25 high-risk and specialized populations; and

26 (3) Provide followup services to individuals accessing the 988 crisis hotline.

27 d. Collaborate with the national suicide prevention lifeline and the veterans crisis
28 line for purposes of ensuring consistent public messaging about the 988 crisis
29 hotline and available services.

30 4. For purposes of this section:

- 1 a. "988 crisis hotline" means a state-identified hotline participating in the national
2 suicide prevention and mental health crisis lifeline network to respond to
3 statewide or regional behavior health and substance use crisis calls.
- 4 b. "Communication connection" means a telephone access line, wireless access
5 line, unique voice over internet protocol service connection, or functional
6 equivalent uniquely identifiable by a number, internet address, or other
7 designation in which connections are enabled, configured, or capable of making
8 988 calls, texts, and chats.
- 9 c. "National suicide prevention lifeline" means a national network of local crisis
10 centers maintained by the federal substance abuse and mental health services
11 administration which provides free and confidential emotional support to people
12 in suicidal crisis, behavioral health crisis or emotional distress, twenty-four hours
13 a day, seven days a week.
- 14 e.d. "Service user" means a person that is provided a 988 communication connection
15 in the state.
- 16 e.e. "Veterans crisis line" means the veterans crisis line maintained by the Secretary
17 of Veterans Affairs under section 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code.
- 18 5. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton
19 misconduct, each provider of a communications service and its employees, agents,
20 suppliers, and subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting
21 directly or indirectly from the total or partial failure of any transmission to an
22 emergency communication service or for damages resulting from the performance of
23 installing, maintaining, or providing 988 service.
- 24 6. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton
25 misconduct, 988 crisis hotline agencies, employees, agents, suppliers, and
26 subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting directly or indirectly
27 for acts completed within the scope of an individual's employment responsibilities
28 including crisis stabilization services, outreach, de-escalation, stabilization, resource
29 connection, or followup support.

30 **SECTION 2.** Chapter 57-40.7 of the North Dakota Century Code is created and enacted as
31 follows:

57-40.7-01. Definitions.

In this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:

1. "Assessed communications service" means a software service, communication connection, cable or broadband transport facilities, or a combination of these facilities, between a billed retail end user and a service provider's network, which provides the end user, upon contacting 988, access to the dedicated 988 network. The term includes a telephone exchange access service, wireless service, and voice over internet protocol service.
2. "Assessed communications service provider" means any person that provides telecommunications services under a license issued by the federal communications commission.
3. "Commissioner" means the tax commissioner.
4. "Communication connection" means a telephone access line, wireless access line, unique voice over internet protocol service connection, or functional equivalent uniquely identifiable by a number, internet address, or other designation in which connections are enabled, configured, or capable of making 988 calls, texts, and chats.
5. "Telephone access line" means the principal access to the telephone company's switched network, including an outward dialed trunk or access register.
6. "Voice over internet protocol service" means a service that enables real-time two-way voice communications, requires a broadband connection from the user's location, requires internet protocol-compatible customer premises equipment, and permits users generally to receive calls that originate on the public switched telephone network and to terminate calls to the public switched telephone network.
7. "Wireless access line" means each active wireless and prepaid wireless telephone number assigned to a commercial mobile radio service subscriber, including end users of resellers, billed in the state.
8. "Wireless service" means commercial mobile radio service as defined in 47 U.S.C. 332(d)(1) and includes:
 - a. Services commonly referred to as wireless; and
 - b. Services provided by any wireless real-time two-way voice communication device, including radio-telephone communications used in:

1 (1) Cellular telephone service;

2 (2) Personal communications service; or

3 (3) The functional or competitive equivalent of a radio-telephone
4 communications line used in cellular telephone service, personal
5 communications service, or a network radio access line.

6 **57-40.7-02. 988 fee imposed - Assessed communications services.**

7 1. There is imposed a fee in the amount determined annually under section 1 of this Act
8 per month per communication connection which must be applied equally upon all
9 assessed communications services.

10 2. The commissioner shall provide notice of the 988 surcharge fee for the calendar year,
11 as determined under section 1 of this Act, to assessed communication service
12 providers on or before November first by posting the notice on the commissioner's
13 website.

14 3. If the amount of the prepaid wireless emergency 988 fee imposed by this section is
15 separately stated on an invoice, receipt, or other similar document provided to the
16 consumer, the 988 fee may not be included in the base for measuring any other tax,
17 fee, surcharge, or other charge imposed by this state, any political subdivision of the
18 state, or any intergovernmental agency. A political subdivision of the state may not
19 charge an additional 988 fee.

20 4. Prepaid wireless services are not subject to the fee imposed by this section.

21 5. The assessed communications service provider shall collect the fee from the
22 subscriber or customer of the service.

23 6. For assessed communications service that involves a monthly billing, in the billing
24 statement or invoice to the subscriber, the provider shall state the amount of the fee
25 separately.

26 7. An assessed communications service provider is required to collect, report, and remit
27 the 988 fee imposed under this section. An assessed communication service provider
28 shall complete a monthly 988 surcharge fee return reporting the amount of the 988 fee
29 for the period covered by the return, and any other information the commissioner may
30 require. An assessed communication service provider shall file the return by electronic
31 data interchange or other electronic media as determined by the commissioner. The

1 fee levied is due and payable on or before the last day of the month succeeding each
2 monthly period.

3 8. An assessed communication service provider may deduct and retain one percent of
4 the fee.

5 9. The provisions of chapter 57-39.2 pertaining to the administration of sales tax, not
6 inconsistent with the provisions of this chapter, govern the administration of the 988
7 surcharge fee imposed in this chapter.

8 **57-40.7-03. 988 fee fund collections - Deposit.**

9 The commissioner shall remit quarterly the 988 fees collected under this chapter to the
10 state treasurer for deposit in the 988 crisis stabilization fund.

11 **SECTION 3. LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT REPORT - CRISIS STABILIZATION FUND.**

12 During the 2025-26 interim the department of health and human services shall provide an
13 annual report to the legislative management on the balance of the 988 crisis stabilization fund.
14 The report must include information regarding the growth and balance of the fund and any
15 recommendations, findings, or conclusions the department deems necessary.

16 **SECTION 4. APPROPRIATION - DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES -**

17 **988 CRISIS HOTLINE PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION.** There is appropriated out of any
18 moneys in the community health trust fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the
19 sum of ~~\$500,000~~ \$50,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the department of
20 health and human services for the purpose of establishing and implementing a 988 crisis hotline
21 program, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

22 **SECTION 5. EFFECTIVE DATE.** Section 2 of this Act is effective for taxable periods
23 beginning after December 31, 2025.

2025 HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS

SB 2200

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee Roughrider Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
4/7/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 50-06 and chapter 57-40.7 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund and the imposition of a 988 access fee; to provide for a legislative management report; to provide an appropriation; to provide a continuing appropriation; and to provide an effective date.

11:08 a.m. Chairman Vigesaa opened the meeting.

Members present: Chairman Vigesaa, Representatives Anderson, Berg, Bosch, Brandenburg, Fisher, Hanson, Louser, Martinson, Meier, Monson, Murphy, Nathe, O'Brien, Pyle, Richter, Sanford, Stemen, Swiontek, Wagner

Members absent: Vice Chairman Kempenich, Representatives: Mitskog, J. Nelson

Discussion Topics:

- Siren Network
- Public Safety and Health
- Community Healthcare Trust Fund
- ND Suicide Rates
- 988 Texts

11:08 a.m. Representative M. Ruby introduced the bill.

11:18 a.m. Chairman Vigesaa closed the meeting.

Krystal Eberle, Committee Clerk

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Appropriations Committee Roughrider Room, State Capitol

SB 2200
4/16/2025

A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 50-06 and chapter 57-40.7 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis stabilization fund and the imposition of a 988 access fee; to provide for a legislative management report; to provide an appropriation; to provide a continuing appropriation; and to provide an effective date.

9:01 a.m. Chairman Vigesaa opened the meeting.

Members present: Chairman Vigesaa, Vice Chairman Kempenich, Representatives Berg, Bosch, Brandenburg, Fisher, Hanson, Louser, Martinson, Meier, Mitskog, Monson, Murphy, Nathe, Nelson, O'Brien, Pyle, Richter, Sanford, Stemen, Swiontek, Wagner

Representative absent: Anderson

Discussion Topics:

- Committee Action

9:01 a.m. Chairman Vigesaa introduced Amendment LC #25.0770.04004, #45016.

9:03 a.m. Representative J. Nelson moved to adopt amendment LC #25.0770.04004.

9:03 a.m. Representative Stemen seconded the motion.

9:04 a.m. Roll Call Vote

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigesaa	Y
Representative Keith Kempenich	Y
Representative Bert Anderson	AB
Representative Mike Berg	Y
Representative Glenn Bosch	Y
Representative Mike Brandenburg	Y
Representative Jay Fisher	Y
Representative Karla Rose Hanson	Y
Representative Scott Louser	Y
Representative Bob Martinson	Y
Representative Lisa Meier	Y
Representative Alisa Mitskog	Y
Representative David Monson	Y
Representative Eric J. Murphy	Y
Representative Mike Nathe	Y
Representative Jon O. Nelson	Y
Representative Emily O'Brien	Y

Representative Brandy L. Pyle	Y
Representative David Richter	Y
Representative Mark Sanford	Y
Representative Gregory Stemen	Y
Representative Steve Swiontek	Y
Representative Scott Wagner	Y

9:04 a.m. Motion passed 22-0-1.

9:05 a.m. Representative J. Nelson moved Do Pass as Amended.

9:05 a.m. Representative Stemen seconded the motion.

9:05 a.m. Roll Call Vote

Representatives	Vote
Representative Don Vigesaa	Y
Representative Keith Kempenich	Y
Representative Bert Anderson	AB
Representative Mike Berg	Y
Representative Glenn Bosch	Y
Representative Mike Brandenburg	Y
Representative Jay Fisher	Y
Representative Karla Rose Hanson	Y
Representative Scott Louser	Y
Representative Bob Martinson	Y
Representative Lisa Meier	Y
Representative Alisa Mitskog	Y
Representative David Monson	Y
Representative Eric J. Murphy	Y
Representative Mike Nathe	Y
Representative Jon O. Nelson	Y
Representative Emily O'Brien	Y
Representative Brandy L. Pyle	Y
Representative David Richter	Y
Representative Mark Sanford	Y
Representative Gregory Stemen	Y
Representative Steve Swiontek	Y
Representative Scott Wagner	Y

9:05 a.m. Motion passed 22-0-1.

9:05 a.m. Representative J. Nelson will carry the bill.

9:06 a.m. Chairman Vigesaa closed the meeting.

Krystal Eberle, Committee Clerk

April 15, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO
SECOND ENGROSSMENT**

CO
4/16/25
10F3

REENGROSSED SENATE BILL NO. 2200

Introduced by

Senators Hogan, Axtman, Lee

Representatives Dobervich, Frelich

In place of the amendments (25.0770.04003) adopted by the House, Reengrossed Senate Bill No. 2200 is amended by amendment (25.0770.04004) as follows:

1 A BILL for an Act ~~to create and enact a new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota~~
2 ~~Century Code, relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis~~
3 ~~stabilization fund; to provide for a legislative management report; and to provide an~~
4 appropriation to the department of health and human services for the 988 crisis hotline program.

5 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

6 ~~— SECTION 1. A new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota Century Code is created~~
7 ~~and enacted as follows:~~

8 ~~— **988 crisis stabilization fund – 988 crisis hotline program – Establishment.**~~

9 ~~— 1. There is created in the state treasury a special fund known as the 988 crisis~~
10 ~~stabilization fund. The fund consists of all moneys deposited through legislative~~
11 ~~appropriation.~~

12 ~~— 2. The department shall establish and implement a 988 crisis hotline program to provide~~
13 ~~crisis outreach, stabilization, and acute care to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.~~
14 ~~The department may adopt rules in accordance with chapter 28-32 for the purpose of~~
15 ~~implementing this section.~~

16 ~~— 3. In developing the program, the department shall:~~

17 ~~— a. Fund the 988 crisis hotline to provide intervention services and crisis care~~
18 ~~coordination to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.~~

- 1 ~~b. Contract with crisis vendors to provide or administer crisis outreach, stabilization,~~
2 ~~acute care, and marketing for the 988 crisis hotline.~~
- 3 ~~c. Contract with a nonprofit organization to operate the 988 crisis hotline and~~
4 ~~provide intervention services and crisis care coordination to individuals calling the~~
5 ~~988 crisis hotline from any jurisdiction within the state, twenty four hours a day,~~
6 ~~seven days a week. The nonprofit organization must:~~
- 7 ~~(1) Have an active agreement with the administrator of the national suicide~~
8 ~~prevention lifeline for participation within the network;~~
- 9 ~~(2) Meet the national suicide prevention lifeline requirements for serving~~
10 ~~high-risk and specialized populations; and~~
- 11 ~~(3) Provide followup services to individuals accessing the 988 crisis hotline.~~
- 12 ~~d. Collaborate with the national suicide prevention lifeline and the veterans crisis~~
13 ~~line for purposes of ensuring consistent public messaging about the 988 crisis~~
14 ~~hotline and available services.~~
- 15 ~~4. For purposes of this section:~~
- 16 ~~a. "988 crisis hotline" means a state-identified hotline participating in the national~~
17 ~~suicide prevention and mental health crisis lifeline network to respond to~~
18 ~~statewide or regional behavior health and substance use crisis calls.~~
- 19 ~~b. "National suicide prevention lifeline" means a national network of local crisis~~
20 ~~centers maintained by the federal substance abuse and mental health services~~
21 ~~administration which provides free and confidential emotional support to people~~
22 ~~in suicidal crisis, behavioral health crisis or emotional distress, twenty four hours~~
23 ~~a day, seven days a week.~~
- 24 ~~c. "Service user" means a person that is provided a 988 communication connection~~
25 ~~in the state.~~
- 26 ~~d. "Veterans crisis line" means the veterans crisis line maintained by the Secretary~~
27 ~~of Veterans Affairs under section 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code.~~
- 28 ~~5. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton~~
29 ~~misconduct, each provider of a communications service and its employees, agents,~~
30 ~~suppliers, and subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting~~
31 ~~directly or indirectly from the total or partial failure of any transmission to an~~

~~emergency communication service or for damages resulting from the performance of installing, maintaining, or providing 988 service.~~

~~6. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton misconduct, 988 crisis hotline agencies, employees, agents, suppliers, and subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting directly or indirectly for acts completed within the scope of an individual's employment responsibilities including crisis stabilization services, outreach, de-escalation, stabilization, resource connection, or followup support.~~

~~SECTION 2. LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT REPORT - CRISIS STABILIZATION FUND.~~

~~During the 2025-26 interim the department of health and human services shall provide an annual report to the legislative management on the balance of the 988 crisis stabilization fund. The report must include information regarding the growth and balance of the fund and any recommendations, findings, or conclusions the department deems necessary.~~

SECTION 1. APPROPRIATION - DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES -

988 CRISIS HOTLINE PROGRAM. There is appropriated out of any moneys in the community health trust fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of \$500,000, or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the department of health and human services for the purpose of ~~establishing and implementing a~~the 988 crisis hotline program, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
REENGROSSED AND AMENDED SB 2200**

Appropriations Committee (Rep. Vigesaa, Chairman) recommends **AMENDMENTS** ([25.0770.04004](#)) and when so amended, recommends **DO PASS** (22 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). Reengrossed SB 2200, as amended, was placed on the Sixth order on the calendar.

25.0770.04004
Title.
Fiscal No. 1

Prepared by the Legislative Council
staff for Representative Vigesaa

April 15, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO SECOND ENGROSSMENT

REENGROSSED SENATE BILL NO. 2200

Introduced by

Senators Hogan, Axtman, Lee

Representatives Dobervich, Frelich

In place of the amendments (25.0770.04003) adopted by the House, Reengrossed Senate Bill No. 2200 is amended by amendment (25.0770.04004) as follows:

- 1 A BILL for an Act ~~to create and enact a new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota-~~
- 2 ~~Century Code, relating to the creation of the 988 crisis hotline program and the 988 crisis-~~
- 3 ~~stabilization fund; to provide for a legislative management report; and to provide an~~
- 4 appropriation to the department of health and human services for the 988 crisis hotline program.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:

- 6 ~~SECTION 1. A new section to chapter 50-06 of the North Dakota Century Code is created~~
- 7 ~~and enacted as follows:~~
- 8 ~~988 crisis stabilization fund - 988 crisis hotline program - Establishment.~~
- 9 ~~1. There is created in the state treasury a special fund known as the 988 crisis-~~
- 10 ~~stabilization fund. The fund consists of all moneys deposited through legislative-~~
- 11 ~~appropriation.~~
- 12 ~~2. The department shall establish and implement a 988 crisis hotline program to provide-~~
- 13 ~~crisis outreach, stabilization, and acute care to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.~~
- 14 ~~The department may adopt rules in accordance with chapter 28-32 for the purpose of-~~
- 15 ~~implementing this section.~~
- 16 ~~3. In developing the program, the department shall:~~
- 17 ~~a. Fund the 988 crisis hotline to provide intervention services and crisis care-~~
- 18 ~~coordination to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline.~~

- ~~b. Contract with crisis vendors to provide or administer crisis outreach, stabilization, acute care, and marketing for the 988 crisis hotline.~~
- ~~c. Contract with a nonprofit organization to operate the 988 crisis hotline and provide intervention services and crisis care coordination to individuals calling the 988 crisis hotline from any jurisdiction within the state, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The nonprofit organization must:~~
- ~~(1) Have an active agreement with the administrator of the national suicide prevention lifeline for participation within the network;~~
- ~~(2) Meet the national suicide prevention lifeline requirements for serving high-risk and specialized populations; and~~
- ~~(3) Provide followup services to individuals accessing the 988 crisis hotline.~~
- ~~d. Collaborate with the national suicide prevention lifeline and the veterans crisis line for purposes of ensuring consistent public messaging about the 988 crisis hotline and available services.~~
- ~~4. For purposes of this section:~~
- ~~a. "988 crisis hotline" means a state-identified hotline participating in the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis lifeline network to respond to statewide or regional behavior health and substance use crisis calls.~~
- ~~b. "National suicide prevention lifeline" means a national network of local crisis centers maintained by the federal substance abuse and mental health services administration which provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis, behavioral health crisis or emotional distress, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.~~
- ~~c. "Service user" means a person that is provided a 988 communication connection in the state.~~
- ~~d. "Veterans crisis line" means the veterans crisis line maintained by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs under section 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code.~~
- ~~5. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and wanton misconduct, each provider of a communications service and its employees, agents, suppliers, and subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting directly or indirectly from the total or partial failure of any transmission to an~~

~~emergency communication service or for damages resulting from the performance of
installing, maintaining, or providing 988 service.~~

~~6. Except for action or inaction that constitutes gross negligence or willful and
wanton misconduct, 988 crisis hotline agencies, employees, agents, suppliers, and
subcontractors are not liable for the payment of damages resulting directly or indirectly
for acts completed within the scope of an individual's employment responsibilities
including crisis stabilization services, outreach, de-escalation, stabilization, resource
connection, or followup support.~~

~~SECTION 2. LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT REPORT - CRISIS STABILIZATION FUND.~~

~~During the 2025-26 interim the department of health and human services shall provide an
annual report to the legislative management on the balance of the 988 crisis stabilization fund.
The report must include information regarding the growth and balance of the fund and any
recommendations, findings, or conclusions the department deems necessary.~~

**SECTION 1. APPROPRIATION - DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES -
988 CRISIS HOTLINE PROGRAM.** There is appropriated out of any moneys in the community
health trust fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of \$500,000, or so
much of the sum as may be necessary, to the department of health and human services for the
purpose of ~~establishing and implementing a~~the 988 crisis hotline program, for the biennium
beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT:**Senate Bill No. 2200 - Department of Health and Human Services - House Action**

	Base Budget	Senate Version	House Changes	House Version
Crisis hotline program		\$500,000		\$500,000
Total all funds	\$0	\$500,000	\$0	\$500,000
Less estimated income	0	500,000	0	500,000
General fund	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
FTE	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Senate Bill No. 2200 - Other Changes - House Action

This amendment:

- Removes a section creating a new section to Chapter 50-06 relating to the establishment of the 988 crisis stabilization fund and program.
- Removes a section providing for an annual Legislative Management report on the balance of the 988 crisis stabilization fund.
- Amends a section to provide an appropriation of \$500,000 from the community health trust fund to the Department of Health and Human Services for the 988 crisis hotline program.