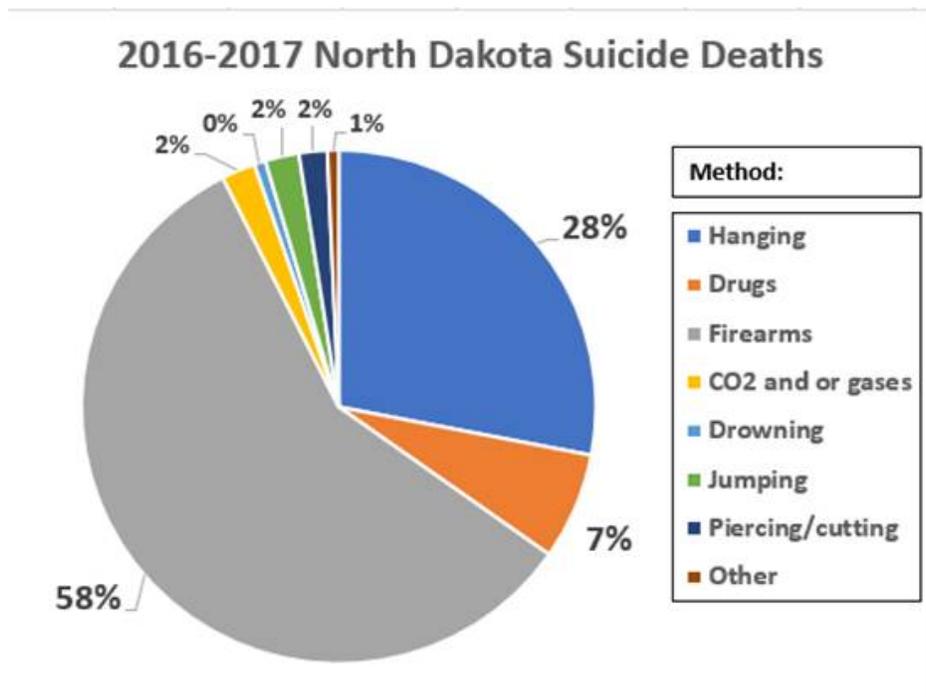


Good morning, Chairman Koppelman and members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Alison Traynor and I am the Suicide Prevention Program Director for the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH). I am here to provide informational testimony relating to House Bill 1537.

In 2017, suicide took a record-breaking 148 lives across all age groups in North Dakota. A report released in 2018 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that North Dakota's suicide death rate had increased more than any other state, rising 58 percent since 1999. Suicide has consistently been the second leading cause of death for North Dakota youth and young adults. While women attempt suicide more often than men, men are three times more likely to die by suicide than women. Working-age men make up the largest proportion of suicide deaths in the state.

In North Dakota, the largest percentage of suicide fatalities is from firearms, accounting for 58 percent of the deaths in 2016-2017. (NDDoH Vital Records)



Firearms are more lethal than other suicide means. A study that examined suicide in eight states revealed that like North Dakota, suicide attempts by firearms were most likely to result in death, while other suicide methods such as drug overdose, poisoning and cutting had the lowest rates of fatality. (Harvard School of Public Health)

National suicide research suggests that suicide is often impulsive. In one study, one in four people (24%) who survived a suicide attempt reported deciding to take their own life within five minutes of their suicide attempt. (Houston Study, Simon 2005)

For these reasons, suicide prevention experts have started focusing on policies and practices that put time and distance between people at risk of suicide and the most deadly means they could use in a suicide attempt. A number of studies reported by the Harvard School of Public Health have indicated that when lethal means are made less available or less deadly, suicide rates by that method decline, and frequently suicide rates overall decline.

We are experiencing a suicide crisis in North Dakota. The causes of this are complex. Effective suicide prevention must, therefore, be comprehensive and include multisector partners and approaches. While access to lethal means is not a root cause of suicide, it is a risk factor for suicide. "Means reduction" (reducing a suicidal person's access to highly lethal means by putting time and distance between them and the most deadly means they could use in a suicide attempt) is an important part of a comprehensive, public health approach to suicide prevention.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.