



**RE: Support H7858 Bridge Barriers in Rhode Island**

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My name is Kerrie Constant, and I am a resident of Warwick, RI, and the Area Director for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Rhode Island Chapter (AFSP-RI). AFSP-RI is a voluntary health organization that gives those affected by suicide a nationwide community empowered by research, education, and advocacy to take action against this leading cause of death.

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony in support of bill H7858, which directs the Department of Transportation, in conjunction with the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority, to erect safety barriers or safety netting on the Mount Hope Bridge, the Claiborne Pell Bridge, and the Jamestown Verrazzano Bridge.

***Bridge barriers are a proven structural suicide intervention, preventing a suicidal person's access to lethal means.*** Structural barriers on bridges have been proven to reduce suicide rates across the world. Examples include Memorial Bridge in Augusta, Maine, U.S.A. [1]; the Bloor Street Viaduct in Toronto, Canada [2]; Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol, England [3]; the Jacques-Cartier Bridge in Montréal, Canada [4]; and the Grafton Bridge in Auckland, New Zealand [5, 6]. Structural bridge barriers have reduced the number of suicides at these sites.

Suicide is a leading, preventable public health problem in Rhode Island; suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death in ages 10 to 44. ***As a mother of a son, age 26, who has experienced suicidal ideations and mental health challenges, I recognize how important minimizing access to lethal means is to save lives.*** Barriers give suicidal individuals and those who care for them something they desperately need – TIME. Time for the intense suicidal risk to diminish and time for someone to intervene with mental health support and resources. Research consistently shows that the majority of those averted from a suicide attempt at a publicly accessible area of height do not go on to complete suicide elsewhere or with another method, and overall, suicide deaths often decline throughout the surrounding area after structural barriers are in place.

Last year, I sat in on the Finance Committee hearing, where a statement was made by the Department of Transportation that their goal was a **ZERO mortality rate** on the roads of Rhode Island. This statement struck me to think-Are the lives lost by suicide on Rhode Island bridges included in the mortalities on the roads of Rhode Island. Perhaps, working together with the support of The Department of Transportation and The Turnpike and Bridge Authority, a statement could be made to make it a goal to have ZERO mortalities, not just on our roads but on our bridges as well.

Committee members, your support of Bill H7858 will affirm how important it is to prevent suicide and save and protect the lives of Rhode Islanders. Together, we can prevent the tragic loss of life by bridge suicides that have a profound impact on families and communities.

With Gratitude and Hope,  
*Kerrie Constant*



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