

RE: Support HB 7858 for Bridge Barriers in Rhode Island

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Thank you for the opportunity to share written testimony in support of HB 7858, 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, no later than August 1st, 2025.

My name is Melissa Ames, and I am an Advocacy Ambassador for the RI Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. The volunteer-led Rhode Island Chapter of AFSP is here to save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide -- through research, education, advocacy, and support to our Rhode Island community.

Suicide is a leading, preventable public health problem in our state. In Rhode Island, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth and adults ages 10-44. By working together with leaders and advocates like all of you here today, I know we can make progress toward this goal and save lives.

As a survivor of suicide loss, suicide barriers on bridges in our state are of utmost importance to me. Barriers give suicidal individuals and those who care for them something they desperately need: time. This includes time for the suicidal impulse to pass, time for someone to intervene, or time to seek help.

Through research, in comparing all bridge suicide prevention approaches – barriers, signs, telephone hotlines, bridge patrols, and staff trainings –research shows that the most effective form of prevention are legitimate barriers that physically restrict access. Research also consistently shows that the majority of those averted from a suicide attempt at a bridge do not go on to complete suicide elsewhere or with another method.

One study, which followed up on over 500 individuals who were stopped from attempting suicide at the Golden Gate Bridge, found that only 6% of those individuals later died by suicide. Overall suicide deaths often decline throughout the surrounding area after bridge barriers are in place. In addition, the subsequent reduction in media coverage of suicides by jumping helps remove the allure of bridge locations as “suicide magnets” and helps to reduce copycat suicides.

Committee members, I am grateful for your consideration of HB 7858 and for working with your colleagues and other agencies to address the bridge suicide rate among our state's population and to bring HOPE.

We all have a role to play in preventing suicide, and with your support, passage of this legislation will affirm Rhode Island's commitment to improving the lives of our residents and preventing the tragic loss of life to suicide in the future.

Please feel free to contact me at missyamesafsp@gmail.com or 401-447-9816 with any questions or if you would like additional information.