

May 15, 2024

Melissa Cotta, RN, MSW, LMT, CH
RI Bridging the Gap - Founder
House Bill – H7858
In Favor Of

Dear Chairman, First Vice Chair, Second Vice Chair, & Members of the House Finance Committee,

I've been an advocate for suicide prevention bridge barriers in RI for the past eight and a half years. I started this advocacy in 2016 after I was unable to stop a bridge suicide and then witnessed the jump from the 35 inch low railing on the Mount Hope Bridge. Since 2016, there have been more than 40 deaths off of the 4 bridges in Newport County, including the Sakonnet River Bridge.

Bridge suicide is a public health issue in Rhode Island that dates back decades. It is documented that hundreds of people have died. To shine more light on the scope of this problem, the number of people left behind that suffer in the aftermath of these preventable deaths is enormous. The ripple effect is so vast it can't be measured.

This is the fifth consecutive year RI legislative bills for bridge barriers are being heard at the statehouse. Each year bridge suicide loss survivors and advocates submit verbal and written testimonials. Some have done this for 5 consecutive years. Some can't bring themselves to be here because the grief is too painful. Some push themselves to come twice each year because the House and Senate companion bills are heard separately. Some drive great distances from other states to be here. Some gather up all their strength and courage to be here. But these are just a few of the many sacrifices these people make to fight for change to make our bridges safe. The toll on these survivors goes far beyond the inconveniences of our legislative process and even beyond the retriggering of their trauma. The loss of life changes their lives forever.

Many of the verbal & written testimonials over the past 5 years included valid research data that bridge barriers save lives. Data regarding the high cost of police, fire, & coast guard response calls to each jump vs the cost of the barriers was submitted. Data was provided showing that physical barriers on bridges are a proven suicide deterrent and that statistically, those deterred do not go on to "find another way." Reducing access to lethal means such as bridges will reduce the number of suicide deaths and allow time for people to get treatment & support. The need for bridge barriers has been well established. The research is crystal clear.

I ask that you listen to and read all the testimonials, put aside any personal biases, and vote in favor of House Bill H7858. Thank you.