



RI Department of Health
Three Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908-5097

TTY: 771
www.health.ri.gov

March 12, 2024

Susan R. Donovan, Chair
House Committee on Health and Human Services
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H 7732 – An Act Relating to Health and Safety—Office of State Medical Examiners

Dear Chair Donovan:

Please accept this letter in support of H 7732, legislation introduced at the request of the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), that would include among the responsibilities of the RIDOH's Office of State Medical Examiners (OSME), the responsibility to provide for a multidisciplinary team review of suicide deaths to reduce the prevalence of these deaths by examining trends in demographic, geographic and community risk factors. This act would take effect upon passage.

R.I. Gen. Laws § 23-4-3 authorizes the OSME to establish a Child Death Review Team, an Overdose Fatality Review Team, and a Pregnancy and Postpartum Death Review Team. These three teams conduct thorough, interdisciplinary reviews of the circumstances surrounding deaths of specific populations, including some suicide fatalities, but do not focus exclusively on suicide.

In Rhode Island, an average of 120 suicide deaths occurred each year from 2012 to 2021. A significant reduction in suicide deaths in Rhode Island has not been observed. Preliminary data for 2022 (as of August 1, 2023), show that suicide deaths in Rhode Island have increased for a second consecutive year to a projected total of 134 suicide deaths.

By establishing a Suicide Fatality Review Team, RIDOH can begin to capture the circumstances surrounding suicide-related deaths more comprehensively and create systems and programmatic changes to address root causes. By comprehensively and systematically reviewing the circumstances surrounding suicides, RIDOH can begin to prioritize the groups most at risk and work to implement strategies to prevent further suicide deaths in these populations.

RIDOH encourages your favorable consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Utpala Bandy", followed by the word "for" in a smaller, simpler font.

Utpala Bandy, MD, MPH
Interim Director

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services
The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy