

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H-5053

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To: The Honorable House Committee on Finance
From: Bryan Ganley, Co-founder
Bridging the Gap for Safety and Healing

Before I begin my comments, I would like to extend my condolences to everyone who has lost a loved one to these unprotected bridges. Our hearts go out to you as we work to honor the lives of our loved ones by making Rhode Island's Mount Hope, Pell and Jamestown bridges safer through the installation of suicide prevention barriers. We owe this to them.

My name is Bryan Ganley , I am the co-founder of Bridging the Gap for Safety and Healing along with Tiverton resident Melissa Cotta. We formed our coalition in 2015. Melissa contacted me after witnessing a suicide from the Mt. Hope Bridge. Our volunteer mission is to see suicide prevention barriers on our state's three major bridges that cross Narragansett Bay and to offer support and healing to those who have lost a loved one to these unprotected bridges.

I have been a suicide prevention volunteer since 1981, when I became a volunteer for The Samaritans of Rhode Island. Since that time, in addition to serving as Crisis Hotline/Listening Line volunteer, I have been involved in their many programs the agency's Life Line at the ACI and our Safe Place survivors support group. I am currently a member of the board of directors. In the late 1980's, I was fortunate to have served as a member of the Braga Bridge Task Force resulting in Sen Tom Norton and Rep Joan Menard sponsoring legislation that ultimately resulted in the installation of barriers on the Braga Bridge. .

I have lost many friends and family to suicide and including suicide from these bridges that have a "Four Foot Nothing Rail".* With my Samaritan training, I have befriended people in crisis who were at the bridges or on their way to a bridge threatening to jump. Unfortunately, at The Samaritans, we see the pain and devastation for the loved ones left behind to pick up the pieces, their grief shared at our support group.

Many suicides can't be predicted or prevented, but suicides from bridges is something we can predict and actively prevent with the installation of Suicide Prevention Barriers on our states three major bridges.

As a Hotline/Listening Line volunteer, we are trained to first remove the means of suicide. Access to those bridges and the absence of barriers, is a means of suicide. A bridge with 135' drop and only a 3' rail, is like handing a suicidal person a loaded gun. These bridges are all loaded guns. We need to take away the gun.

*An expression of Kevin Hines, Golden Gate Bridge jump survivor

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As a union construction worker, OSHA 30 Certified, safety is first on my job as it is on the bridges. I am not allowed within 6' of a potential fall hazard of 12' or more without wearing an approved safety harness. The Mt. Hope Bridge railing which is 35". The Pell Bridge rail at 42".

These iconic structures promote the beauty of the state, but the state is providing the means for suicide. The architects of our bridges did not consider the suicidal in their designs but times have changed and the safety of the public should be first priority. It is time to fix what the architects missed. Barriers.

Studies show suicide prevention barriers are the most effective means of suicide prevention. Signage and telephones are a supplement to barriers. Studies also indicate potential jumpers to do not seek alternative locations.

Today, I am asking you to support this life saving legislation to install suicide prevention barriers on the Mt. Hope, Pell and Jamestown Verrazano Bridges - not only to prevent future suicides but also to give closure to all the families who have lost loved ones to our Rhode Island's unprotected bridges.

Our state motto is Hope.

It is time to make Hope a reality and suicide from Rhode Island's bridges a thing of the past.

Respectfully submitted,

Bryan Ganley