

Chris O'Brien

From: Daryl Velez <darylvelez@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 21, 2021 8:55 AM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: Support HB 5053 for Bridge Barriers in Rhode Island

Daryl Velez
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Volunteer, Rhode Island Chapter
Phone: 603-978-4509 Email: darylvelez@gmail.com

Dear Chairman and Committee Members,

Thank you for your consideration of testimony in support of HB 5053, which directs the Department of Transportation and the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority to erect safety barriers or safety netting on the Mount Hope, Claiborne Pell and Jamestown Verrazzano Bridges, no later than January 1, 2023.

My name is Daryl Velez and I am a survivor of suicide loss and a volunteer with the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention ("AFSP"). The mission of AFSP is to save lives and to bring hope to those affected by suicide. We fund and perform research, educate the public, and advocate for suicide prevention throughout the Ocean State.

Suicide is both prevalent and preventable. It is prevalent in that one person dies by suicide every 68 hours in Rhode Island. It is preventable because our research shows that when people are presented with barriers in attempting suicide, their risk of dying by suicide decreases dramatically. Studies consistently show that those who have attempted suicide at a bridge with a barrier do not go on to die by suicide elsewhere or by another method.

Driving over all three of the aforementioned bridges connecting our communities in Rhode Island is striking. There are absolutely no barriers which would prevent an individual from attempting suicide. The views of our waterways are beautiful, but we should not be so cavalier in our dismissal of the risks these barrier-less bridges present to the public.

The need for bridge barriers or netting is pressing. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on many members of our communities, including affecting individuals' mental health. There is, unfortunately, a statistical connection between the coronavirus and an increased rate of suicide across the United States. Rhode Island has a chance to be a leader in the fight against COVID-19, and in preventing all deaths associated with the pandemic.

AFSP is grateful for your consideration of HB 5053. We hope to work with you, your colleagues and other agencies to develop a comprehensive plan to address the problem of suicide in Rhode Island. Your support, and the passage of this legislation, affirms Rhode Island's commitment to preventing the tragic loss of life stemming from suicide attempts on our bridges. Please reach out to me with any questions or concerns. Thank you for helping to keep Rhode Island families safe.

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, the AFSP Rhode Island Chapter is grateful for your consideration of HB 5053 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.

We look forward to working with all of you to bring suicide Out of the Darkness and HOPE to our RI Communities. Please feel free to contact me at missyamesafsp@gmail.com or 401-447-9816 with any questions or if you would like additional information.



Virus-free. www.avast.com