



## **Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority**

One East Shore Road | P.O. Box 437 | Jamestown, Rhode Island 02835-0437

February 24, 2021

Marvin Abney, Chair  
Committee on Finance  
Rhode Island House of Representatives  
Room 35 – State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: **House Bill No. 5053**

Dear Chairman Abney and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony concerning House Bill No. 5053, which would require that safety barriers be constructed on the Newport Pell, Mount Hope, and Jamestown Verrazzano Bridges by January 2023. To be clear, the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority (“RITBA”) has not taken a position on the bill but offers this written testimony to address some of the considerations.

The safety of our bridges is paramount to RITBA, and we have worked closely with various groups involved with suicide prevention efforts. We have posted signs on our bridges for the Samaritans of Rhode Island, E-911, and East Bay Community Action Program/Bristol Health Equity Zone. More recently, we have invested in a sophisticated, interactive camera and intercom system that will detect, at the earliest opportunity, the presence of an unauthorized individual on a bridge. While the camera/communications system serves as part of our Automated Traffic Management System (“ATMS”) and will have other uses, its primary purpose and a significant percentage of its cost relate to suicide-prevention features developed with the assistance of psychologists and other experts. The system is designed to dispatch trained professionals to a person in need and to communicate with the individual while help is on the way. The system has sophisticated audio and video analytic capabilities for pinpointing rescue locations in the water without delay.

RITBA trained its personnel on the new system last week, and we expect to go live with it on the Pell Bridge in a matter of weeks. I also expect to make available soon a detailed summary of the system features designed to prevent the use of a bridge for the purpose of suicide.

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Altering the structure of bridges that are 92 years old, 52 years old, and nearly 30 years old, respectively, requires careful study. Any kind of a fence, steel mesh net, or other barrier could affect the integrity and safety of the bridge on which it is installed. We will need to commission studies of the structural effects of a barrier, the load bearing effects, wind/aerodynamic effects, and the impact on access to the bridge for routine maintenance and inspections, as well as access by first responders to bridge incidents. Anticipated regulatory considerations include designation of the Mount Hope Bridge as an historic structure on the National Register and with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Society.

RITBA stands ready to work with the bill sponsors and the Finance Committee to identify and consider the many factors and challenges associated with bridge suicide prevention efforts.

Thank you. We are available to answer any questions that the Committee may have.

Respectfully,



LORI CARON SILVEIRA  
Executive Director