



BRIDGING THE GAP FOR SAFETY AND HEALING

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April 12, 2022

TO: House Committee on Finance

From: Bridging the Gap for Safety and Healing Co-Founders,
Melissa Cotta and Bryan Ganley

Subject: Letter in Favor of 22- H7383

As founders of Bridging the Gap for Safety and Healing, and on behalf of the more than 5,200 signers of our petition in support of the installation of suicide prevention barriers on Rhode Island's bridges over Narragansett Bay and most importantly in memory everyone we have lost to suicide from our bridges and to honor the family and friends who are living with the memory of this preventable tragedy, we are writing to support H7383.

To start, we want to answer the question – Do physical barriers work?

Per the Army Corp of Engineers, on Cape Cod's Sagamore and Bourne bridges, where 12-foot-high suicide deterrent fences were installed in 1983, they report the following:

"According to what information we have, during a 28-year period after the fencing was installed, between 1984 and 2012, a total of 7 persons committed suicide from the bridges. A far lower rate of incidence than what was recorded for the years before the fencing was installed as part of the major rehabilitation project started in 1979." "Since 2013 we know of two attempts that were prevented thanks to the quick actions of state and local law enforcement officers. The presence of fencing may not only deter attempts from occurring, it can also delay an attempt long enough to give law enforcement a chance to successfully respond to an incident when one does occur."

Per the RI Department of Health, from 2009-2018, there were at a minimum 33 bridge suicides in Bristol and Newport County. From November 2020 to October 29, 2021, we know of twelve (12) falls/suicides from Rhode Island's bridges over Narragansett Bay. Approximate total: 45

*Addition events may or may not have been called into local police and not brought to the attention of Corps.

The pandemic and now war has exacerbated the stressors in all aspects of life in Rhode Island, the USA and around the world. The impact of the pandemic on public health both physical and emotional has been well established. We can only imagine from past history, the impact of the war in our future.

Deaths from Rhode Island's iconic bridges must stop now.

- There is no other state or privately-owned facility where accidental falls/suicide deaths would be tolerated.
- In private industry, OSHA has strict fall prevention guidelines and, after an accident, emergency response requirements which must be implemented before work can recommence.
- Installation of barriers removes the means of a suicide attempt; just as we remove guns from the suicidal.
- Global studies document the need for barriers as well as document there is no evidence would be suicide jumpers go elsewhere.
- The Army Corp of Engineers, Cape Cod have document and support the effectiveness of barriers.
- There are barriers on the Bourne, Sagamore, and Braga bridges.
- Along the Massachusetts and Rhode Island coastline, only RI continues to tolerate these needless injuries and deaths by not addressing the need for physical deterrents.
- Per the CDC, Suicides/suicide attempts cost the nation almost \$70 billion per year in lifetime medical and work-loss alone. <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/polaris/healthtopics/suicide/index.html>

As two Rhode Islanders personally impacted by bridge suicides, we support the need for additional mental health services. But, as old battles that are decades old, within the medical and behavioral health communities, to fight for market share of clients and funding, suicide from our bridges is something we can actually prevent.

Until temporary and finally permanent barriers are erected, every death will represent our collective failure to finally say "enough".

Sincerely,

Melissa J. Cotta
80 Brackett Avenue, Tiverton RI 02878

Bryan S. Ganley
7 Prenda Lane, Bristol RI 02809

cc: Rep. Joseph Solomon and Sen. Louis DiPalma;
Denise Panichas, Ex. Director, The Samaritans of RI

Attachments: Rescue Plan proposal; media coverage list.

-End-

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Petition and Media Coverage

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Petition in Support of Barriers on Change.org = 4,586 Petition signers (as of 3/7/22)) tinyurl.com/ribridgingthegap

Below is a partial media list by year (received local, statewide, regional and national coverage)

Year – 2022 – Requesting Temporary Barriers as well as Introduction of 2022 Legislation for Permanent Barriers

<https://warwickonline.com/stories/support-bridge-protection-bills-to-save-lives.172810>
<https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/local/2022/04/01/suicide-barriers-ri-bridges-save-lives-stop-jumpers-newport-bridge-pell-jamestown-mount-hope/7133340001/>
Providence Sunday Journal Commentary 03/20/22
<https://worldnewsera.com/news/entertainment/tv-news/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-bridges/>
<https://darik.news/connecticut/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-bridges/202202500665.html>
<https://pbn.com/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-bridges/>
<https://www.theday.com/statenortheast-news/20220208/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-ri-bridges>
<https://www.newportri.com/story/news/local/2022/02/08/group-continues-effort-prevent-suicides-ri-bridges/6703731001/>
<https://www.jamestownpress.com/articles/group-works-for-suicide-barriers-on-bridges/>
<https://www.thenewportbuzz.com/advocates-call-for-temporary-barriers-on-bridges-over-narragansett-bay/34834>
<https://www.eastbayri.com/stories/advocates-hopeful-that-bridge-barrier-bill-will-soon-save-lives.101655>
<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rhode-island/articles/2022-02-07/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-bridges>
<https://whdh.com/news/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-bridges/>
http://www.ccenterdispatch.com/news/state/article_6afef692-f4d6-555f-8b39-d7a1a72298a4.html
<https://www.fairfieldcitizenonline.com/news/article/Group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-16838888.php>
<https://www.yahoo.com/now/group-continues-effort-prevent-suicides-165044320.html>
<https://www.abc6.com/rep-solomon-sen-dipalma-bill-would-require-safety-barriers-on-newport-jamestown-mount-hope-bridges/>
<https://whatsupnewp.com/2022/02/rep-solomon-sen-dipalma-bill-would-require-safety-barriers-on-newport-jamestown-mount-hope-bridges/>
<https://reportertoday.com/eastprovidence/stories/rep-solomon-sen-dipalma-bill-would-require-safety-barriers-on-newport-jamestown-mount-hope.38492>
<https://sports.yahoo.com/group-continues-effort-prevent-suicides-165044320.html>
<https://www.wpri.com/news/politics/every-life-counts-ri-lawmakers-call-for-suicide-prevention-barriers-on-state-bridges/>
<https://www.wpri.com/news/local-news/providence/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-bridges/?ipid=promo-link-block1>
<https://www.dailyadvent.com/news/0d2c36888ed51d7e63865f45c229d3e9-Rep-Solomon-Sen-DiPalma-bill-would-require-safety-barriers-on-Newport-Jamestown-Mount-Hope-bridges>
<https://newstral.com/en/article/en/1214479428/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-ri-bridges>
<https://boxersdelosmorritos.com/advocates-call-for-temporary-suicide-prevention-barriers-on-bridges-over-narragansett-bay/>
<https://politiken.store/2022/02/07/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-bridges/>
<https://www.jamestownpress.com/articles/bill-would-construct-suicide-prevention-barriers-on-bridges/>
<https://www.newsbreak.com/news/2510608352016/rep-solomon-sen-dipalma-bill-would-require-safety-barriers-on-newport-jamestown-mount-hope-bridges>
<https://www.chron.com/news/article/Group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-16838888.php>
<https://twitter.com/WhatsUpNewp/status/1491464551719530501>
<https://darik.news/rhodeisland/rep-solomon-sen-diplomat-bill-to-require-security-barriers-on-newport-jamestown-mount-hope-bridges/202202487337.html>
<https://health.digitpatrox.com/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-bridges/>
<https://topnews-usa.com/ri/group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-major-bridges/>
https://coalitionradionetwork.com/in-this-weeks-smith-hill-edition-of-deep-political-philosophy-we-end-the-mask-incarceration/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=in-this-weeks-smith-hill-edition-of-deep-political-philosophy-we-end-the-mask-incarceration
<https://twitter.com/thesamaritansri>
<https://www.mysanantonio.com/news/article/Group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-16838888.php>

<https://www.dailyadvent.com/news/2784d7068112725d72cbacbf4aa1032-Group-continues-effort-to-prevent-suicides-from-RI-bridges>

<https://www.newstimes.com/news/article/Group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-16838888.php>

<https://www.thehour.com/news/article/Group-seeks-barriers-to-prevent-suicides-from-16838888.php>

Year – 2021 – Barriers, Petition and Samaritan Bridge Signs

<https://www.newportri.com/story/opinion/columns/guest/2021/04/09/guest-view-suicide-prevention-barriers-bridges-needed-now/7154650002/>

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/04/07/metro/advocates-call-suicide-prevention-barriers-iconic-ri-bridges/>

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/07/28/metro/after-years-advocacy-huge-first-step-toward-suicide-prevention-barriers-ri-bridges/>

<https://www.providencejournal.com/story/opinion/2021/11/15/opinion-panichas-barriers-ris-bridges-could-prevent-suicides/6343329001/>

<https://thepublicsradio.org/article/east-bay-residents-push-for-safety-barriers-on-local-bridges>

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKewiGqv_iq4n2AhWRkIkEHQe2ChE4ChAWegQIAxAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.newportri.com%2Fstory%2Fnews%2Flocal%2F2021%2F07%2F19%2Fnewport-county-bridges-suicide-barrier-effort-continues-petition-bourne-sagamore-cape-cod%2F7986844002%2F&usq=AOvVaw1YpdC2-mIQWH8eirZsBQUO

<https://www.newportthisweek.com/articles/suicide-barrier-bill-proposed-by-dipalma/>

<https://johnstonsunrise.net/stories/bridge-signs-barriers-and-monica-dickens.170127>

<https://cranstononline.com/stories/bridge-signs-barriers-and-monica-dickens.170127>

<https://herbweiss.blog/2021/07/26/we-can-prevent-suicide-by-bridge-2/>

<https://rnewstoday.com/its-time-to-end-suicide-by-bridge-herb-weiss/>

<https://trackbill.com/bill/rhode-island-senate-bill-117-an-act-relating-to-highways-rhode-island-turnpike-and-bridge-authority-provides-that-a-safety-barrier-or-safety-netting-would-be-erected-on-the-mount-hope-bridge-the-claiborne-pell-bridge-and-the-jamestown-verrazzano-bridge-no-later-than-january-1-2023/2008997/>

<https://cranstononline.com/stories/we-can-prevent-suicide-bridge.163797>

<https://upriseri.com/2021-03-22-rhode-island-state-house-3/>

<https://announce.today/home/announce/cwLnDIE5IP9vAb6Tde5t>

<https://www.abc6.com/thousands-sign-petition-calling-for-suicide-prevention-barriers-on-ri-bridges/>

https://mobile.twitter.com/bridging_for

<https://www.newportthisweek.com/articles/dipalma-pushes-for-suicide-barriers/>

<https://eastbayri.com/portsmouth/stories/activists-launch-petition-drive-in-support-of-bridge-barriers.91651?>

<https://www.jamestownpress.com/articles/petition-calls-for-suicide-barriers-on-bridges/>

[Bridge signs, barriers and Monica Dickens | Block Island Times](#)

Year – 2020

<https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/suicide-prevention-group-proposes-barriers-on-ri-bridges/2061064/>

<https://turnto10.com/news/local/suicide-prevention-group-proposing-barriers-on-rhode-island-bridges>

<https://warwickpost.com/rep-solomon-bill-would-require-bridge-barriers-preventing-suicides/>

<http://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/ODN/ProJoApp/shared/ShowArticle.aspx?doc=TPJ%2F2020%2F02%2F02&entity=Ar01101&sk=42A49A8F&mode=text>

<https://warwickonline.com/stories/solomon-bill-would-have-suicide-prevention-barriers-installed-on-3-state-bridges.151120>

<https://www.eastbayri.com/bristol/stories/advocates-celebrate-bill-to-put-suicide-barriers-on-bridge.76474?>

<https://paolinoproperties.com/2020/02/23/rep-joseph-solomon-jr-and-denise-panichas-of-the-samaritans-of-rhode-island-join-joe-paolino-in-the-arena/>

<https://patch.com/rhode-island/portsmouth/ri-lawmaker-calls-suicide-barriers-3-east-bay-bridges>

<https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/politics/2020/01/31/lawmaker-wants-to-require-suicide-prevention-measures-on-pell-jamestown-mount-hope-bridges/1794949007/>

<https://fbapp.congressweb.com/assets/BackgroundDocuments/70147535-0C42-B1F3-E3DB3ED529C97A80/RI%202020%20Brief%20Final.pdf>

<https://www.newsbreak.com/news/1488769619111/suicide-prevention-group-proposes-barriers-on-ri-bridges>

<https://hi-in.facebook.com/nbc10/posts/10156788411339149>

Year – 2019

<https://www.eastbayri.com/stories/can-bridge-barriers-save-lives.74252>

<https://www.eastbayri.com/tiverton/stories/can-bridge-barriers-save-lives.74252>



BRIDGING THE GAP FOR SAFETY AND HEALING
Co-founders Bryan Ganley and Melissa Cotta
Petition for Barriers on RI's Unprotected Bridges over Narragansett Bay
tinyurl.com/ribridgingthegap

October 29, 2021

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His Excellency Daniel McKee, Honorable K. Joseph Shekarchi, Speaker & Honorable Dominick J. Ruggerio, President
RI General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence RI 02903
Reference: American Rescue Plan State Fiscal Recovery Fund/Response to Public Health Emergency
21H-5053 and 21S-117

Dear Governor McKee, Speaker Shekarchi and President Ruggerio,

Per the RI Department of Health, from 2009-2018, there were at a minimum 33 bridge suicides in Bristol and Newport County. As of the writing of this letter, from November 2020 to October 29, 2021, we know of twelve (12) falls/suicides from Rhode Island's bridges over Narragansett Bay. Approximate total: 45. In comparison, per the Army Corp of Engineers, on Cape Cod's Sagamore and Bourne bridges, where 12-foot-high suicide deterrent fences are installed, they report the following:

"According to what information we have, during a 28-year period after the fencing was installed, between 1984 and 2012, a total of 7 persons committed suicide from the bridges. A far lower rate of incidence than what was recorded for the years before the fencing was installed as part of the major rehabilitation project started in 1979." "Since 2013 we know of two attempts that were prevented thanks to the quick actions of state and local law enforcement officers. The presence of fencing may not only deter attempts from occurring, it can also delay an attempt long enough to give law enforcement a chance to successfully respond to an incident when one does occur."*

Gentlemen, representing the generations of hopeless Rhode Islanders who have fallen from the unprotected bridges and died as well as those who have fallen and survived with life changing injuries, and on behalf of their families, friends, co-workers and communities impacted by their falls; as well as those who have testified and written letters of support for legislation 21H-5053 and 21S-117; as well as the more than 3,700 signers of our petition in support of our initiative to install physical barriers on the bridges over Narragansett Bay, we respectfully request financial support for three items (1) immediate temporary construction barriers; (2) the engineering study for the design and implementation and (3) installation of said permanent barriers on the Mount Hope, Pell, Jamestown and Sakonnet Bridges – under the category of Public Health Emergency.

BRIDGING THE GAP FOR SAFETY AND HEALING
Request for Physical Barriers on Bridges over Narragansett Bay

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The pandemic has exacerbated the stressors in all aspects of life in Rhode Island, the USA and around the world. The impact of the pandemic on public health both physical and emotional has been well established. Deaths from Rhode Island's iconic bridges must stop now.

- There is no other state or privately owned facility where accidental falls/suicide deaths would be tolerated.
- In private industry, OSHA has strict fall prevention guidelines and, after an accident, emergency response requirements which must be implemented before work can recommence.
- Installation of barriers removes the means of a suicide attempt; just as we remove guns from the suicidal.
- Global studies document the need for barriers as well as document there is no evidence would be suicide jumpers go elsewhere.
- The Army Corp of Engineers, Cape Cod have document and support the effectiveness of barriers.
- There are barriers on the Bourne, Sagamore, and Braga bridges.
- Along the Massachusetts and Rhode Island coastline, only RI continues to tolerate these needless injuries and deaths by not addressing the need for physical deterrents.
- Per the CDC, Suicides/suicide attempts cost the nation almost \$70 billion per year in lifetime medical and work-loss costs alone.

<https://www.cdc.gov/policy/polaris/healthtopics/suicide/index.html>

As two Rhode Islanders personally impacted by bridge suicides, we support the need for additional mental health services. But as the medical and behavioral health community continues decades old battles over market share for clients and funding, suicide from our bridges is something we can prevent.

Until the temporary and permanent barriers are erected, every death will represent our collective failure to finally say "enough".

Sincerely,

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cc: Rep. Joseph Solomon and Sen. Louis DiPalma;
Denise Panichas, Ex. Director, The Samaritans of RI

-End-