

Dear Chair Representative Marvin L. Abney and Members of the Committee:

I am writing as a mental health counselor in support of H5776 and S710. This legislation will facilitate the design and installation of suicide barriers on bridges along Narragansett Bay.

Counselors in Rhode Island regularly work with patients experiencing suicidal ideation and behaviors. We know firsthand the distress that people with suicidal ideation experience and the devastating impact it has for the families, friends and communities of those who attempt or complete the act. We continue to look for ways to better protect people when they are the most vulnerable.

One way Rhode Island can do that would be to erect suicide prevention barriers on our major bridges. Bridges, unfortunately, are well-documented locations for deaths by suicide, and research has shown that physical barriers are one of the most effective means of preventing suicide by jumping. For example, after installation of nets on the Golden Gate Bridge, there was a 73% decrease in death by suicide at that site. Further, we know that people in a suicide crisis often act impulsively. If we prevent a suicide attempt – e.g., with a bridge barrier – data show that many people do not seek an alternative method. The installation of barriers is not just a structural change—it is a lifesaving intervention.

Beyond the immediate impact of preventing deaths, these barriers send a strong message about our commitment to mental health and suicide prevention. Suicide is a preventable public health crisis, and Rhode Island has the opportunity to take a proactive stance in saving lives. Investing in these safety measures aligns with best practices in suicide prevention and demonstrates our state's dedication to supporting mental health initiatives.

As a mental health provider, I urge you to support H5776 and S710 and to prioritize the safety and well-being of our residents. Thank you for your time and consideration of this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

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"I am not what happened to me...I am what I choose to become." --Carl Jung

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