

I am writing this because I believe there is an urgency to begin taking actual measures to provide protections on bridges that are being used by so many people to take their own lives by suicide. It is way past time! Let's not just talk about it.....let's do it! I hope this bill can begin to bring about the necessary change for the RI bridges that have claimed too many lives already!

This is deeply personal for me because on July 23, 2023 I lost my very beloved nephew, Matthew Michael Lowry to suicide at the young age of 28. Sadly, Matthew chose the Mt. Hope Bridge as a means to end his desperate struggle with mental health and depression. It is THE day that changed my life and my families lives forever!

That beautiful July afternoon at 3:15 p.m., in what we believe was a spontaneous act, we lost a young man who had a very tender heart and a tremendous love for his family and others! Matthew was very smart, funny, quick witted, charismatic, and just loved to spend time with his family and friends. He loved to write and was an avid sports fan that could quote sports statistics like any sports caster I've ever listened to since he was very young. Matthew just loved to give to others and was actually preparing to begin training to become a peer support specialist for others who struggled like he did. Only several weeks before his death he became a godfather to his cousins' little girl and as a family we could see it was probably the most impactful day of his life. He was just so honored and thrilled! Even though all these things were very true of my nephew, he also faced a daily struggle with depression and bipolar from his teen years. He actively sought help and was on medications (another huge issue in my mind) and even the week before his passing he knew he needed help so he checked himself into Butler Hospital in Providence where he had been several times before. This time however, he was put in a situation that only worsened his state of mind (a whole other topic that needs to be addressed seriously) and after 5 days of it he checked himself out on Monday, July 20th. He followed up with his regular dr. and even sat down with his mother, father and younger brother to discuss a "safety plan" for him because he knew he wasn't where he needed to be yet. He had conversations with me and other aunts and uncles, family members and friends, and we felt encouraged because we could tell he wanted to live.....he was making plans and actively engaging with others! On Thursday, the 23<sup>rd</sup> I was chatting with my sister, his mother, and I even told her that I really thought he was going to be ok. He was at that time out for breakfast with his dad, brother and a cousin that was visiting and he made plans to go to dinner at another cousin's house and even workout with her husband. He was out for a drive as he liked to do and he continued to communicate with his mom, myself and others, but he apparently started feeling anxious and had determined he was just going to go home and reschedule with his cousin.

We all have to live without ever knowing what really happened that day, but the Mt. Hope Bridge was on his way home and in a moment of sudden desperation he apparently saw that bridge as a way to end his struggle. He ended his courageous fight to survive and eyewitness accounts claim that he just parked his car and without hesitation jumped to his death!! To this day, I wonder often if he changed his mind immediately after. We can only think now, what if that bridge had barriers up? Would that moment of desperation have passed until he could have gotten safely home? Or reached out to someone? I have read that research has found when a person's preferred means is thwarted they don't usually automatically resort to another method. In fact, the percentage is over 60% that if deterred from a bridge, they do not seek out other jumping points. As far as we are concerned.....our Matthew did not have to die! My nephew will not be at any more family gatherings, birthdays, holidays, weddings, etc., and he will never have a family of his own, something he really wanted one day. If you have not already lost a loved one to suicide, the chances are you will at some point at the very least know someone who has. Wouldn't you want your child, niece, nephew, brother, sister, husband, wife

or even friend to be given a chance to pause because they can't just jump at the moment they feel they so desperately need to?? I wish so much that our Matthew had been given that pause!! For most of us now, travelling over bridges is extremely painful and an overwhelming weight on the heart is endured to just get across the bridge. His mother, my sister, has not yet been able to drive on one and as a passenger must close her eyes or bury her face in her hands!! That one spontaneous moment has lifelong consequences on top of the fact that Matthew is gone from here far too soon!

Perhaps, many might think it is not the responsibility of the state to protect and spend this kind of money on people who are suicidal. Well, those are not likely people who have lost a loved one to suicide.....yet!! As a society we need to do what we can to save lives that's for sure and I see things around the state that I am sure cost a LOT of \$\$\$ and they look nice, but they certainly don't add to the quality of life and nor will they protect anyone in any way!

I am now an active volunteer for AFSP-RI because it is too late for us to help my nephew, but I simply cannot sit complacently by without doing something to help others from meeting such a tragic death, or to keep other families from having to tell these kinds of heart wrenching stories that forever change their lives. Mental health issues are real and suicide is claiming the lives of so many each year and especially our young people!!!

PLEASE consider this my exceedingly great support for this bill.....we need to "just do it"!!!

Sincerely and with much hope,

Diane Proulx