



Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority

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

May 21, 2025

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL

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

Re: **House Bill No. 5776**

Dear Chairman Abney and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony concerning House Bill No. 5776, which would require that construction of safety barriers on the Newport Pell, Mount Hope, and Jamestown Verrazzano Bridges (collectively, the “Bridges”) begin by August 1, 2026. The Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority (“RITBA”) offers this written testimony to address some of the key considerations, including feasibility and timing.

The safety of our bridges is paramount to RITBA. To determine whether safety barriers could be installed on the Bridges, we first had to determine whether they are feasible from an engineering perspective. Altering the structure of the Bridges, which are nearly 96 years old, 56 years old, and 33 years old, respectively, required careful study. Any kind of fence, steel mesh net, or other barrier could affect the integrity and safety of the bridge on which it is installed. Studies were done to determine the structural effects of a barrier, the load bearing effects, wind/aerodynamic effects, and the impact on access to the bridge for routine maintenance, inspections, and capital improvements and repairs, as well as access by first responders to bridge incidents.

To determine whether barriers were possible on our bridges, RITBA awarded a contract to the engineering firm of Atkins Global for conceptual study services related to suicide deterrents. RITBA was awarded \$1 million in ARPA funding for the feasibility study of the Mount Hope and Jamestown Verrazzano Bridges, and an additional \$750,000 in ARPA funding to do a feasibility study of the Newport Pell and the Sakonnet River Bridges. Atkins has since delivered final reports on all four bridges. Atkins determined that both Mount Hope and Newport Pell

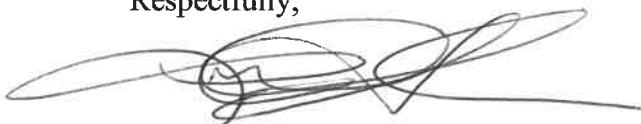
The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, Committee on Finance
May 21, 2025
Page Two

Bridges cannot support structural deterrent options due to both the dead load and wind load conditions they would create. Jamestown Verrazzano Bridge can support a structural deterrent option of less than recommended height with some conditions. Based on the current load rating and inspection reports, no additional dead load can be placed on the bridge. The existing outer railings would have to be removed to install a barrier that is limited to the weight of the outer railings. This limits the height and results in a barrier less than the recommended height. Sakonnet River Bridge, the newest of the four, can support structural deterrent options. In the meantime, to further address the matter of safety on our bridges, RITBA staffs its operations center 24/7/365 with traffic management technicians who monitor the bridges. The traffic management technicians are trained to operate a camera system that has views on all four bridges and watch for the presence of an unauthorized vehicle or individual on a bridge. In addition, we have worked closely with various groups involved with suicide prevention efforts and have posted signs on our bridges for the Samaritans of Rhode Island, E -911, and the East Bay Community Action Program/ Bristol Health Equity Zone.

It is impossible for RITBA to meet all the requirements set forth in House Bill No. 5776, given the comprehensive results included in the final feasibility study reports. Safety of the Bridges for public safety vehicles, including first responders, and for commuters, commerce, and all travelers remains paramount.

RITBA remains ready to continue to work with the bill sponsors and the Committee on Finance to identify and consider the many factors and challenges associated with public suicide prevention efforts.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lori Caron Silveira', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the left.

LORI CARON SILVEIRA
Executive Director