

Chris O'Brien

From: Michelle Sherman <mlowry1815@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 21, 2025 8:27 AM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: Written testimony for House Bill No. 5776

Submitted by Michelle Sherman
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To the Chairperson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Michelle Sherman, and I'm writing in support of the proposed House bill no. 5776 to install safety barriers on major bridges across our state.

On July 27, 2023, I lost my cousin Matthew to suicide at the Mount Hope Bridge. It was a tragedy that has forever changed our family, and I believe it could have been prevented.

Matthew was more than his illness. He was deeply loving, generous, and hopeful about the future. He was also the godfather to my youngest daughter. At her baptism, he gave us letters he had written to our family. In the one to my daughters, he said:

"I'll be there for your birthdays, graduations, and weddings... I'll hug you when you need a hug, dry your tears, and be there in some way or form as long as I possibly can be."

He wanted to live.

Four days before he died, he admitted himself to Butler Hospital because he wasn't feeling safe. We visited, talked, and laughed. He told me about an earlier suicide attempt, one year before, where he had driven to the Mount Hope Bridge, parked his car, and started walking. He prayed, "God, if you don't want me to do this, send someone." A police officer showed up moments later and saved his life.

He told me how scary and impulsive it had felt—how he didn't even fully realize what he was doing. "It was like I was walking up the bridge like a soldier," he said.

Four days later, we were expecting him for dinner. He texted to say he was feeling anxious and would stay home, but reassured me that he was safe. Hours later, we got the call.

He had driven to the same bridge, gotten out of the car, and jumped. Witnesses said he didn't pause.

I believe he acted on impulse again—and I believe a barrier could have saved him.

Bridge barriers provide that crucial moment of hesitation. That moment can mean everything for someone in crisis. These aren't just structures—they're second chances.

Matthew should still be here. He should be playing with his goddaughter and living the life he dreamed of. Instead, we are left with heartbreak and "what-ifs."

I urge you: please support this bill. You have the opportunity to save lives.

Thank you for your time, and for hearing my story.

Sincerely,
Michelle Sherman
North Kingstown, RI