



suicide prevention resource center

Crisis Hotline: 401-272-4044 • Toll Free: 800-365-4044 • Business Line: 401-721-5220 • Fax: 401-753-7938

May 12, 2026

To: The Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee  
Subject: Written Testimony in support of H8148.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of The Samaritans of Rhode Island, board member and advocate Bryan Ganley and myself, I write in strong support of Representative Joseph Solomon's legislation, H-8148, directing the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority to design safety barriers and/or netting for the Mount Hope, Pell, Sakonnet River, and Jamestown Verrazzano Bridges.

From 2014–2025, Rhode Island recorded 1,983 suicide deaths. Of these, 48 deaths (2.42%) occurred from just four bridges: Newport/Pell (32), Mount Hope (12), and Jamestown (4). These numbers are not incidental. They represent a geographically concentrated pattern of loss at state-owned structures.

Several facts are essential for the committee's consideration:

1. Bridge suicides are almost always 100% fatal.
2. Forty-eight deaths from four structures is not "small." It is a clear, documented pattern of risk.
3. These deaths are uniquely public and traumatic. Unlike most suicide deaths, which occur in private spaces, bridge deaths shut down traffic, require marine recovery, traumatize witnesses, involve multiple state agencies, and leave families with a violent, public loss.
4. The CDC's "Value of a Statistical Life" is approximately \$10 million. Forty-eight bridge deaths represent an estimated \$480 million in societal cost — a staggering burden that far exceeds the cost of prevention.
5. The state owns the hazard — and the solution. When the state owns the structure, the state bears responsibility for mitigating a known, preventable danger.

Fall-prevention barriers are evidence-based and widely implemented. They are currently in place on bridges in Ithaca, New York; the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge; the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge; the High Bridge in New York City; the Northaven Bridge in Texas; and, as many Rhode Islanders know, on the Bourne and Sagamore Bridges on Cape Cod, where barriers have significantly reduced deaths. (See MassDOT attachment.)

In Rhode Island, the state owns these bridges, knows the risk, and has the duty to act. H-8148 is the responsible step to end preventable deaths over Narragansett Bay — and to establish safety barriers as the standard on all Rhode Island bridges.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to the safety and well-being of Rhode Islanders.

Respectfully submitted,



Denise Panichas, Executive Director

**dpanichas@samaritansri.necoxmail.com**

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**From:** Canaday, Anne C. (DOT) <Anne.C.Canaday@dot.state.ma.us>  
**Sent:** Friday, September 12, 2025 12:48 PM  
**To:** dpanichas@samaritansri.necoxmail.com  
**Cc:** Moreno, Nicholas (EEA)  
**Subject:** RE: Question? from Denise Panichas, Ex. Director The Samaritans of Rhode Island  
**Attachments:** Means Deterrence for the Cape Cod Bridges.pdf

Good afternoon, Director Panichas,

MEPA Analyst Nicholas Moreno reached out to me to follow-up on an email he received from you on a question you had related to the Cape Cod Bridges about whether “*prevention barriers are included in the new design of the Bourne and Sagamore bridges*”.

Yes, the current design recommendation for the new Bourne and Sagamore bridges is to have both hard and soft barriers for means deterrence (*i.e. prevention barriers*). For hard barriers, a tension mesh fence standing approximately 9 feet by 9 inches (9'-9") tall from the finished surface of the bridge deck is recommended. This fence type has been used on several bridges with a history of suicide in Ithaca, New York. Tension mesh fencing has also been used on the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge, the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, and the High Bridge in New York. The current design recommendation most closely mirrors the details utilized on the Northaven Trail Bridge in Texas. Fences will be provided on all sides of the bridges – roadway and shared use path – and as a protective screen on the median between the road and path. In addition to means deterrence, the recommendations weighed factors such as cost, maintenance, aesthetics, user experience, and barrier fence interaction during vehicular collisions. For soft barriers, signage and an intervention plan are recommended. Please see the attached rendering of the means deterrence for the Cape Cod Bridges.

Sincerely,  
Anne Canaday

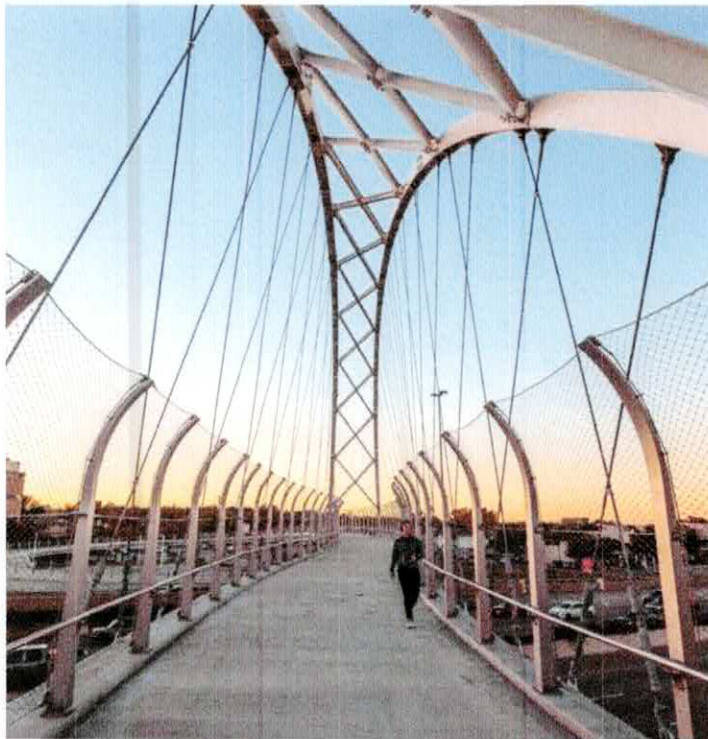
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**Sent:** Friday, September 5, 2025 3:12 PM  
**To:** Moreno, Nicholas (EEA) <[Nicholas.Moreno@mass.gov](mailto:Nicholas.Moreno@mass.gov)>  
**Subject:** Question? from Denise Panichas, Ex. Director The Samaritans of Rhode Island

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*Figure 1 - Northaven Trail Bridge, Texas*



*Figure 2 - Rendering of the Shared Use Path for the Borne and Sagamore bridges*