

I am writing to request support for the funding of bridge barriers in Rhode Island. This is a personal issue for me and my extended family because on July 27, 2023, my nephew, Matthew Lowry, died by suicide after jumping from the Mount Hope Bridge. Matthew struggled with mental health issues and was actively involved in the treatment process, and prior to his passing was full of hope and wanted to become a Mental Health Peer Support Specialist. The impact of his death on our family and friends has been devastating, and not a day goes by that I do not think about him.

According to Care New England Butler Behavioral Health, between 2021 and May 2023, 17 people died by suicide after jumping from Rhode Island bridges. Matthew was not counted in those statistics, nor have the subsequent years of such deaths been included. The Newport Pell, Mount Hope, Jamestown Verrazzano, and Sakonnet River Bridges are high-risk sites, prompting ongoing advocacy for suicide prevention barriers on these four major bridges.

Based upon a 2017 study conducted in Switzerland, installing safety nets reduced suicides by 77.1%, while installing barriers led to a 68.7% reduction. I have attached that study for your review. Reports regarding the Golden Gate Bridge since barriers were installed in 2023 indicate that the nets are working as intended to save lives and deter people from coming to the bridge to harm themselves. Over the last 20 years, there were on average 30 confirmed suicides at the bridge every year. In 2024, one year after the net was completed, there were eight suicides at the bridge, reducing the annual number of suicides by 73%. Moreover, the number of attempts also declined after the net was completed. I have attached this information for your review as well.

Additionally I have attached information regarding Congressional funding grants that the State of Rhode Island may be eligible to apply for in addition to the funding we are requesting today. I believe that consulting with civil engineers and specialized structural engineers can produce designs that overcome concerns regarding cost, structural integrity, aesthetics, and maintenance while prioritizing the preservation of human life.

Bridge barriers are not simply infrastructure projects; they are proven suicide prevention measures that save lives and spare families unimaginable grief. Research consistently shows that suicidal crises are often impulsive and temporary, and restricting access to lethal means can provide the critical time necessary for intervention and survival.

No family should have to endure the pain of losing a loved one in this way when effective prevention measures exist. I respectfully urge you to support funding and action to install suicide prevention barriers on Rhode Island's high-risk bridges. Doing so would represent a meaningful commitment to mental health, public safety, and the value of every human life.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Lowry