

Representative Marvin Abney  
Chairman House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street Providence, RI 02903

May 12, 2026

Dear Representative Abney and members of the House Finance Committee:

Thank you for taking the time to consider my written personal and professional testimony today, in support of **H 8148: Safety barrier on bridges**. My name is Michaela Cook, I currently reside in Cranston, RI. I am a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker for individuals and families from across the state (since MSW in 2013). I am also a volunteer field advocate for the RI Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (since 2016) and a long-term survivor of suicide loss who has utilized the services available within the department of behavioral healthcare, developmental disabilities, and hospitals as a consumer (since 2003).

I am writing today as I am unable to attend in person, due to my fully booked schedule and professional obligations as a clinical supervisor and outpatient therapist with an active caseload of 106 clients; including children (as young as 6) through adults attending in-person sessions, regularly to support their mental health and wellness. My professional obligations and range of clinical support required of me, consistently, during the hours of 08:00AM and 7:00PM Monday through Friday are also congruent with the level of support and attention needed at this time. I also participated today in a training called **CALM Conversations to Prevent Suicide: Counseling on Access to Lethal Means** during my lunchtime break. Ironically, the training is also the reason why this bill is so important.

My own journey of loss and healing began on October 31, 2003, when I lost my best friend and college sweetheart, Jonathan Bagley to a death by suicide (Essex Junction, Vermont). Since that day, my life's work has been invested in my own recovery from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, grief and advocacy efforts in my own life, while also helping others heal through their own symptoms and loss of loved ones to suicide. The Quechee Gorge Bridge was a favorite spot that Jon loved to visit. Today and for many years, the gorge has had protective barriers on the access bridge, which significantly lowered the rate of suicide there **AND** it does not take away from the beauty of this and highlights the need for support to save lives in Vermont. I visit this place frequently to support my healing journey and memory of Jon's loss, 23 years ago (see the photos below).

Support of the above-mentioned bill (**H 8148: Safety barrier on bridges**) is an imperative step

towards decreasing access to lethal means (with barriers on our bridges) to prevent life lost can also be an effective way we can to prevent others from a death by suicide.

Thank you again to Representative Solomon and Representative Casey for continuing to advocate for this imperative bill to limit access to lethal means for preventable deaths by suicide.

Best Regards,

Michaela Cook, LICSW

Volunteer Field Advocate

AFSP RI Chapter

Jonathan E. Bagley 11/21/1978-10/31/2003

Quechee Gorge, White River Junction, Vermont

Before barriers 2000



After barriers added- photo taken in 2018