

## Steven Sepe

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**From:** Jamie Pahigian <jamiepahigian@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 31, 2026 8:30 AM  
**To:** House State Government and Elections Committee  
**Subject:** SUPPORT (H7576) - Access to Public Traffic Crash Records

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To Chair Shanley and Honorable Members of the Committee

I am writing in support of H7576, which would designate records of traffic crashes in Rhode Island to be public records. As a volunteer road safety advocate, and board secretary of the Providence Streets Coalition, I have extensive experience accessing or attempting to access crash data for projects for the public good. I will attempt to explain concisely why these records are important, and the problem this bill seeks to remedy.

The Providence Streets Coalition has for several years maintained a map of crashes in which pedestrians and cyclists have been hit by cars in Providence, using data provided by our local police department. This is an important tool for community members to use in advocating for road-safety improvements in their neighborhoods. It's also useful for planners and traffic engineers to consult in determining where hazards currently exist, so that infrastructure improvements can be targeted to improve safety. Some of our mapping tools have even been used by RIDOT in the early planning stages of North Main Street's redesign.

We would love to expand this mapping project to produce a statewide map. In many states, such a map is maintained by the DOT and made freely available online. Rhode Island is not one of those states, so we've sought to fill that gap. However, the only comprehensive record of traffic accidents in RI is held by RIDOT. When a local police department files crash reports, RIDOT is able to automatically import those records from each town or city's database using an expensive patchwork of interconnected IT systems funded by taxpayers. We have not been able to access this data set. RIDOT treats their compiled record as privileged information and refuses to release it to the public. We have sought to compile the records ourselves by submitting APRA requests to all 39 municipalities in RI, but found that many towns lack either the expertise or the technological capability to produce the records we need from their systems. The system RIDOT has set up is the only viable means of compiling the records.

Under federal law 23 U.S.C. § 407, crash data compiled by state DOTs for the purpose of making safety improvements is not discoverable or admissible in civil litigation. Under Rhode Island's APRA law, records that would not be available to parties involved in litigation are excluded from disclosure to the public. It is this unintended loophole in APRA that RIDOT uses to justify withholding critical safety data from the public. The language of H7576 is targeted to address this specific loophole only. It is explicit in stating that it does not authorize any use of the records in question that might be prohibited by federal law. It finally suggests that public bodies releasing crash records may choose to include a disclaimer

referencing the limitations on use under federal law. Such a disclaimer is standard on public facing maps and data portals in the many states that make crash records public.

RIDOT has made no argument that I'm aware of for why their position might be in the public's interest. They have not made a case that public access to crash data would be harmful to RIDOT as an organization. They have cited no unintended negative effects in the many states that make crash data publicly accessible (at least 42 states last time we counted). There is no reason why Rhode Island should remain an outlier on this issue. RIDOT's tight control on crash data means that local infrastructure decisions are often made without crucial data regarding patterns of past crashes. We believe this is an intolerable state of affairs that must be remedied. I urge you to support H7576.

Sincerely,

Jamie Pahigian

The Providence Streets Coalition