



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLY CHEESEMAN
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RANKING MEMBER
FINANCE, REVENUE AND BONDING COMMITTEE

MEMBER
GENERAL LAW COMMITTEE
ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

March 29, 2021 * 9:00am * Zoom

Dear Chairmen Daugherty Abrams and Steinberg, Ranking Members Hwang, Somers, and Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee.

I am writing in opposition to Section 1 of **Raised SB 1085, AN ACT CONCERNING SUICIDE PREVENTION**. The premise behind this section of this bill is laudable and worthy, but the creation of a new board in statute to replace the already existing Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board risks undoing years of progress and leaving out many of the partners that have made this board so successful. Indeed, the following language is taken from the board's own website found in the portal www.ct.gov. "Since January 2012," the CT Suicide Advisory Board (CTSAB) has functioned as the single state-level suicide advisory board in Connecticut that addresses suicide prevention and response across the lifespan. (This includes the responsibilities of the former Youth Suicide Advisory Board.) It is cooperatively co-chaired by the Departments of Mental Health and Addiction Services and Children and Families (DCF), and is legislatively mandated under DCF." In its mission statement, the CTSAB is described as "a network of diverse advocates, educators, and leaders concerned with addressing the problem of suicide with a focus on prevention, intervention, and health and wellness promotion."

The board's vision statement is as follows: "The CTSAB seeks to eliminate suicide by instilling hope across the lifespan. The CTSAB developed and is responsible for activating the state plan, leads the state campaign that promotes the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the CT Zero Suicide Initiative, and advises state agencies on the use of their suicide-related state and federal dollars from the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Health Resources & Services Administration."

There are numerous sub-committees focusing on areas such as School Wellness, Intervention-Postvention Response, Armed Forces/Community Health and Data and Surveillance. As of 2018, the CTSAB included more than 150 agencies and organizations. The following description of its membership is taken from the CTSAB website:" Average meeting attendance is 45. It's a very diverse coalition of state and community agencies (profit and non-profit), faith-based organizations, hospitals, military, schools, higher education, towns, private citizens, professional associations, health and behavioral health professionals, law enforcement, professional associations, insurance providers,

legislators, students, survivors of loss and their foundations, individuals with lived experience, and advocates.”

The new board, as described in the proposed bill, would exclude many of the organizations whose efforts and input have made the board function so successfully. For example, the Brian Dagle Foundation and Connecticut Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention are not part of the proposed legislation. Input from entities like these are vital as Connecticut addresses the scourge of suicide, which takes far too many lives and is the second leading cause of death in young people aged 15-24.

The pandemic has taken a tragic and lasting toll on this state. The physical toll has been tragic and immense, but the toll taken on the mental health of our residents has been equally dramatic and harmful. Indeed, as the vaccine rollout continues and cases of the virus abate, the mental health aftershocks will continue for years to come. This is no time to disband or reconstitute the already functioning and successful Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board, when its efforts and work will be needed more than ever.

Therefore, I respectfully suggest Section 1 of rSB 1085 be deleted and the current Connecticut Suicide Advisory board remain as currently constituted. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Holly Cheeseman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Holly Cheeseman
State Representative, 37th District
East Lyme, Niantic, Salem