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Anne Donahue –H. 593 – House Transportation and Human Services -- March 8, 2016

Many of you know me as a mental health advocate, so it is logical that Rep. Zagar would have asked me to co-sponsor this bill. Some of you also know that I became an advocate the hard way: through my own experience of serious mental illness, including multiple hospitalizations over a number of years. I often speak about it publically because I think it is vital in the fight against stigma: putting a public face on the reality of recovery.

I don't speak about suicide as often. It is somehow a more brutal subject, and even more personal. But at one point in my life, I was certain enough about the inevitability of my own death by suicide that I drafted my own obituary. It said that Anne Donahue had died at her own hand after a long struggle with depression. I wanted to communicate the fact that mental illness *can* be a terminal illness – not because suicide is an *act* one "*commits*," but because it can be an outcome of an illness.

Suicide is not about wanting to die. It is about a psychic pain that is intolerable – and the desperate need to end that pain – and the certainty that there is no other hope of escape. Yet ultimately there is hope. I am proof of that. I did not die on a day in October of 1995 because, by a stroke of fate, a friend walked into my home unexpectedly, and interrupted my efforts to drown myself. I became one of the 90 percent you will hear about in other testimony, who, once interrupted, does not go on to complete a suicide, but somehow finds the hope and the help to struggle forward, and live.

Eight lives in the past eight years at Quechee Gorge, among hundreds of deaths by suicide during that time. Just a handful. Yet there have been many deaths by auto in these past eight years, as well. If eight of them took place at the same spot – the same intersection; the same stretch of road – would we say, "only eight there, out of hundreds"? Of course not. We would be asking, "What can we do to address safety at this location, that has already claimed eight lives?" That is what this bill asks us to do with Quechee Gorge.

I like to think that my life has value to others around me. I think I contribute to society. I am grateful to have had my suicide attempt interrupted, to have survived my illness, and to continue in recovery. Please help give others that same chance.