



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

## Harckham, Other State Lawmakers, Advocates Call for NYSBA to Erect Means Restriction Fencing on Area Bridges to Prevent Suicides

PETE HARCKHAM September 15, 2023

| ISSUE: **SENATOR HARCKHAM. SD40, SUICIDE PREVENTION, SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH, NEW YORK STATE BRIDGE AUTHORITY**

*Peekskill, NY* – New York State Senators Pete Harckham and James Skoufis; Assemblymembers Dana Levenberg, Chris Eachus and Jonathan Jacobson; and suicide prevention advocates held a press conference today and called on the New York State Bridge Authority (NYSBA) to invest in means restriction fencing, also known as climb deterrent fencing, to be installed on five area bridges overseen by the New York State Bridge Authority (NYSBA).

To see a video of the press conference, click [here](#).

“It’s time to safeguard our friends and neighbors who are thinking of suicide in one simple way: by erecting means restriction or climb deterrent fencing on five area bridges,” said Harckham. “We are calling on the New York State Bridge Authority to make this life saving investment, because waiting just one more day invites another tragedy that could be avoided.”

“During and following the pandemic, we’ve had an epidemic of suicide and mental unwellness,” said Skoufis. “Isolation had an incredible mental and emotional toll. And, sadly, that bears out in the suicide statistics we’ve seen in recent years. Bridge fencing is important because it’s about buying time—trying to get individuals past that suicidal impulse that is overwhelming them.”

Two years ago, Sen. Harckham introduced legislation in the New York Senate (S.7310) requiring the installation of means restriction fencing on all five bridges under the jurisdiction of the New York State Bridge Authority, and a press conference was held at the exact same place at Riverfront Green Park in Peekskill to announce the bill. (Sen. Skoufis was a prime cosponsor.)

Since then, another 10 people have taken their lives on these bridges. Another life was lost on Walkway Over the Hudson, also under jurisdiction of NYSBA. The bill, now [S.2708](#), was reintroduced in January 2023.

“These are eleven unnecessary deaths, and eleven loved ones not celebrating birthdays or holidays or graduations,” Harckham added. “Eleven preventable deaths: because studies have shown that means restriction or climb deterrent fencing can prevent up to 90% of the deaths by suicide from people on bridges.”

Harckham noted that NYSBA has conducted an engineering study and held public outreach on erecting means restriction or climb deterrent fencing on its five bridges. On Sept. 21, NYSBA will vote whether to include capital funding between \$10 and \$63 million for the fencing—and the elected officials and advocates are urging the Bridge Authority to commit spending for the fencing.

Means restrictive fencing and other forms of barrier installation are proven methods of causing individuals to pause and to get through the intense, often brief, moment of suicide crisis. The fencing also gives suicidal individuals time to think and reconsider, as well as time for the intense suicidal risk to diminish, or for someone to intervene with mental health support and resources.

In comparing all bridge suicide prevention approaches, physically restricting access works best. Moreover, research consistently shows that the majority of those averted from a suicide attempt at a bridge do not go on to complete suicide elsewhere or with another method. Overall suicide deaths often decline throughout the surrounding area after bridge barriers are in place. The subsequent reduction in media coverage of suicides by jumping helps remove the allure of bridge locations as “suicide magnets” and helps to reduce copycat suicides.

Marie Considine, executive director of NAMI Westchester, said, “We worked with government officials to have New York State bridges, including the Gov. Mario M. Cuomo (formerly Tappan Zee) Bridge, lit on Sunday, September 10, 2023, to recognize Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month, in memory of those lost, and in honor of those determined to live. We raise awareness in this way, using the bridges as a messaging tool, as we know that NYS bridges have been used as a method of suicide, and NYS needs to do more. We need the barriers as described today, and we need the commitment of the NYS Bridge Authority to get the barriers and permanent messaging funded and installed without delay.”

Maria Idoni, Hudson Valley / Westchester area director of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, said, “The Hudson Valley / Westchester Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and its advocates fully support bridge barriers. The New York State Bridge Authority must install means restriction fencing on its bridges. These six

bridges provide lethal means for about 10 publicly reported suicides and attempts per year. The Bridge Authority has the power to help reduce the suicide rate by installing bridge barriers.”

Assemblymember Chris Eachus said, “Suicide is at crisis-levels in New York State, being the second leading cause of injury-related deaths among our residents. As a member of the Committee on Mental Health, I am hard at work making sure more resources are available to help those who are suffering and need help the most, but we have to do more. Simple, common-sense modifications can be made to save lives here and now. Placing means of restriction such as fencing is one of those common-sense changes, and my colleagues and I are dedicated to making sure the job gets done. It can mean the difference between life and death.”

Assemblymember Dana Levenberg said, “Two of our Peekskill constituents lost their lives to suicide earlier this year, not far from where we are standing now. They joined too many others lost to our society’s ongoing mental health crisis. Safety measures like the fencing we are proposing today must be part of a multifaceted approach to preventing suicide in our communities, along with proactive support for mental wellness and interventions for those who are at increased risk of suicide.”

Assemblymember Jonathan Jacobson said, “It's not enough to prioritize suicide prevention one month out of the year. We must take concrete steps every day to reduce suicide rates, including by installing climb-deterrent fencing at all the bridges managed by the New York State Bridge Authority. As the Assemblymember representing two of the Hudson Valley’s busiest bridges, the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge and the Mid-Hudson (Poughkeepsie) Bridge, I stand with my colleagues in urging the NYSBA to install climb deterrent fencing at all of its bridges.”

Westchester Legislator Erika Lang Pierce said, “A little over two years ago, I received the call no family should ever have to receive: a beloved family member had just ended his life on the Bear Mountain Bridge. Since that day, at least eleven more families have received the same news. We know from research that barriers are extremely effective at reducing suicides on bridges. If we had fencing on the five bridges managed by the Bridge Authority, these 11 people and my uncle and the dozens that came before them, would overwhelmingly still be with us, living their lives. The time is now to stop this madness. We need to install barriers. The Bear Mountain Bridge should not be a bridge of death.”

Roy Ettere, a Somers resident who spoke at the press conference with his wife Lucille, said, “We lost our daughter Nicole six years ago next week. She died by suicide. One of her attempts included jumping off the bridge over the Saw Mill River Parkway. With the help of passersby, I was able to prevent her from jumping. All too often you hear of a distressed person jumping from a bridge to end their life. The call today to install barriers on bridges will prevent people from doing this, and we appreciate the support for this very important initiative to help protect our loved ones.”

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### **2023-S2708**

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- Introduced
- - In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate

- ○ On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate

- ○ Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Requires the installation of climb deterrent fencing on certain bridges

January 24, 2023

In Assembly Committee

Sponsored by **Pete Harckham**

Do you support this bill?