



May 29, 2024

Dr. Minosca Alcantara
New York State Bridge Authority
P.O. Box 1010
2 Toll Plaza Road
Highland, NY 12528

RE: NYSBA Must Act to Prevent Suicides

Dear Dr. Alcantara:

New Yorkers were horrified to learn about a number of suicide attempts on Mid-Hudson bridges, at least one resulting in a fatality, earlier this month. We have been in dialogue with the New York State Bridge Authority (NYSBA) for several years on the need for action to prevent tragedies like these. While we appreciate this discussion, we are concerned by the absence of concrete steps to install proven safety measures like climb deterrent fencing. We write to reiterate our strong support for timely action by NYSBA to avert future loss of life. Absent immediate public commitment by the authority, we will be pursuing legislative remedies to mitigate the longstanding safety issues on the Authority's bridges.

Reducing access to lethal means of self-harm is an important part of a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention. Regrettably, NYSBA bridges have become a magnet for those looking to end their lives.

Most people who engage in suicidal behaviour experience ambivalence: many suicides are a response to acute stressors, and many suicides are impulsive acts. Making lethal means of suicide less easily available gives a person in distress more time for a crisis to pass before taking fatal action.

Decades of research clearly demonstrate that bridge barriers effectively prevent suicides. Other public agencies have succeeded in saving lives by deploying barriers. Until 1986, the Duke Ellington Bridge in Washington, DC, was the site of one-half of all bridge suicides in the city. Following the construction of fencing on the Ellington Bridge, suicides decreased while suicide rates from the non-barrier-restricted Taft Bridge remained unchanged.

Based on the current state of the available research, physical barriers prevent suicides on bridges. Please note there is no evidence that barriers on bridges lead to “method substitution” for would-be victims of suicide.

It is the consensus view of experts in the mental health and suicide prevention field that barriers are the most effective means of preventing suicides on bridges. Furthermore, we are deeply moved by the testimony of survivors of suicide attempts and the families of those that have lost their loved ones to suicide in our advocacy for bridge barriers.

We appreciate NYSBA’s careful review of the issue of suicide prevention. However, as lives continue to be lost, further delay cannot be excused. The evidence is overwhelming that barriers work and residents of the Hudson Valley demand immediate lifesaving action.

We ask that the NYSBA move with all deliberate speed to begin the deployment of suicide prevention barriers. Additionally, as legislators, we will use our offices to ensure that our state’s transportation infrastructure is not the source of needless grief for New York families.

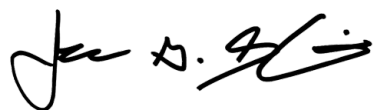
Sincerely,



Senator Peter B. Harkcham
40th Senate District



Senator Nathalia Fernandez
34th Senate District



Senator James G. Skoufis
42nd Senate District



Dana Levenberg
95th Assembly District



Assemblymember Christopher W. Eachus
99th Assembly District



Assemblymember Aileen Gunther
100th Assembly District