

Dear Members of the Finance House Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Sherwood and I am writing in support of the Bridge Safety Barrier Bill # 5776.

Suicide is the 11th leading cause of Death in the United States, 94% of Adults surveyed believe suicide can be prevented and it has been estimated that for each individual death by suicide, 135 people are directly and personally affected. These statistics were found on American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) Website. I and many members of my family became familiar with AFSP after we experienced a suicide in our family.

On July 27, 2023 my nephew Matthew ended his life when he jumped off the Mount Hope Bridge. This was his second attempt at suicide and both times the Mount Hope Bridge is where he chose to end his life. The first time he was saved by a police officer who saw his abandoned car at the entrance of the bridge. The second time was much more harrowing and for the witnesses on the bridge seared in their minds forever. This time he didn't hesitate, he drove his car to the middle of the bridge and got out of his car and jumped to his death. Our family has been absolutely devastated by Matthew's death. Matthew struggled with mental health issues and was working hard to overcome the difficult issues this entailed. He was a beautiful, kind hearted soul full of life, laughter and love.

In the aftermath of his death we all wondered why the bridge did not have any barriers. We learned that those living near the bridge thought it would ruin the aesthetics of the bridge. It was hard for us to fathom how a barrier, albeit an ugly one that could save lives, was not installed for aesthetic reasons.

In addition to the devastating loss we experienced many of us think about those who witnessed Matthews suicide. A barrier could have spared them the trauma of witnessing a man who was in so much pain that he chose to end his life. He saw no other way out of the pain.

I am painting a dramatic picture because I want to emphasize that a bridge barrier could have prevented Matthew's death. The suicides rates where barriers have been installed have lowered suicide considerably. As the aforementioned statistic indicates 94% of people believe suicide can be prevented. A bridge barrier is a preventative measure. Please vote yes for Bill # 5776 and help save the lives of others who see no other way out.

Kind Regards,

Elizabeth Sherwood