

October 12, 2008

Supervisor Brooks Firestone, SBCAG Chair
105 East Anapamu Street, Fourth Floor
Santa Barbara CA 93101

Re: Proposed Safety Barrier, Cold Spring Arch Bridge

Dear Supervisor Firestone:

My name is Emily Dziedzic and my cousin Matthew Aydelott died by jumping from the Cold Spring Arch Bridge on September 8 of this year. I am not a local resident, I currently live in Portland, Oregon, but for those residents of Santa Barbara County who would argue that this is a local issue, all I can say is that I am evidence that the lack of a suicide barrier at the Cold Spring Arch Bridge affects people not only from your county, but from your state, the nation, and indeed around the world. My sister, mother and father, Matthew's mother, brother, sister-in-law, aunts, uncles, cousins and father, and Matthew's countless friends and family members from around the world also attest to this fact as do all of the people from beyond your county who have lost a loved one at this bridge. When someone dies at the Cold Spring Arch Bridge, it is not a local issue, so it is my belief, then, that my support for the construction of a suicide barrier at this site should be taken into consideration, as should the support of anyone whose life has been affected by the loss of someone at this bridge.

Many arguments have been made in opposition to the construction of this barrier and many of them seem to focus on aesthetic or economic concerns. I must say that it is difficult, if not impossible, for me to understand how these arguments can be reconciled with the human costs that have resulted from the lack of a barrier at this site: my cousin Matthew was more beautiful than any bridge and more glorious than any view and I would give everything that I have to have him back. But I understand that emotional pleas have not had an impact on the people currently fighting the construction of the suicide barrier, so I will continue with more rational arguments.

Regardless of the limited aesthetic value of this bridge, no structure can be considered sound when it fails to protect the public from harm. This is not a radical view and, indeed, if a design flaw at the Cold Spring Arch Bridge caused *accidental* deaths at a rate of 33 over the last 25 years, I do not believe that we would be having this debate because all those individuals who currently oppose this project would most likely see how they would potentially be at risk. But what the opponents of the suicide barrier fail to realize is that they actually are at risk. We never know what events in life will happen and what, if anything, might push us or a loved one to the point where we believe that the only possible solution to a crisis is to put an end our life. The fact that this thought is often fleeting and that the irrational impulse to commit suicide can be thwarted with minor impediments means that suicide prevention is crucial.

Some have suggested diverting the money allotted for this barrier into funding for mental health programs, but this is not a viable solution. Despite vast improvements in the treatment of depression over the last four decades, the annual suicide rate remains the same nationwide as it was in 1965: 11 victims per 100,000 inhabitants. So it is unlikely that if the funding for this project were used for mental health programs it would do anything to reduce the number of suicides *by any method* in Santa Barbara County. And it certainly would do nothing to help those who live outside the reaches of Santa Barbara County's mental health services, as my cousin Matthew did. Installing human barriers at the bridge has also been suggested, but there is no evidence that they decrease the suicide rate at a specific site even though their use puts a strain on local public safety personnel. The only action proven to reduce suicides is the introduction of a physical barrier to suicide. When access to a highly effective means of suicide is cut off, suicide rates drop: in states where gun ownership is lower, suicide rates overall are lower and in areas where barriers have been placed on suicide bridges, the overall suicide rate drops.

You have the chance here to save lives. The Cold Spring Arch Bridge is the site of the highest concentration of deaths of any spot location on the state highway system in Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties, and now that the public at large has been made aware that there have been successful suicides at this bridge, it is possible that the suicide rate will continue to spike as it has over the past year. Suicide prevention is always crucial, and the implementation of physical barriers is critical at sites where the method of suicide used is one that doesn't allow a person to change their mind once they have taken the step to end their life. Once the step over a bridge is made, it can't be unmade, which is a tragedy because the wish to undo that step may happen more often than we know. As the survivor of a jump from the Golden Gate Bridge said to himself as he watched his hands slip from the handrail and he began to fall to the water below, "My God, what have I just done?" The ability to take the step off the Cold Spring Arch Bridge must be prevented, and you have the chance to prevent this from ever happening again. Please install a suicide barrier at the Cold Spring Arch Bridge.

Sincerely,



Emily Dziedzic