

## **Lynn Hamilton**

October 13, 2008

Supervisor Salud Carbajal  
First District Supervisor  
105 E. Anapamu St.  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear Supervisor Carbajal:

I am writing this letter to ask for your support of the construction of the suicide barrier at the Cold Spring Bridge.

On September 8, my dear friend Matt Aydelott died at bridge. He had been an important part of my life for nearly 12 years, and I am also close friends with his mother Karen. I am haunted by the fact that he was witnessed sitting on the bridge railing by a passing motorist who called 911...but by the time help arrived, it was too late. A barrier would have given him precious time to reconsider his options for life, and would have allowed rescue personnel sufficient time to reach him. Unfortunately, the grief and sorrow that Matt's family and friends have experienced is preceded by 45 other devastating stories of loss by suicide from that bridge since 1963. A barrier is the only means of preventing this enormous toll on society.

Matt was loved by many; he was kind, gentle soul who spent his career working for those whom society might otherwise overlook. Since 2000, he had worked at Cuesta College, first as a job developer for students transitioning from public assistance; then as an instructor for a program to assist at-risk high school students in finding their paths toward college and careers; and most recently as the director for the Independent Living Program for San Luis Obispo County that assisted teenage foster youth in preparing for their next steps in life as they aged-out of the system. He was passionate about his work serving young people and he made incalculable positive differences in their lives.

How galling, then, to hear the arguments of those opposing the bridge barrier construction as a project unworthy of spending taxpayer dollars. Like others who have written in support of the barrier, I can also take a professional view of this issue. I have an M.S. and Ph.D. in applied economics from the University of Minnesota, and I teach policy and conduct research as a professor at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, where I have worked since 1996. Though it may seem a cold calculation to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of human lives saved at the bridge, some of the impacts can be quantified. For example, Matt's earnings alone over the next 25 years would have approached \$2 million, and assuming an average taxation rate of 30% (perhaps an underestimate), his tax contributions would approach \$600,000 over that time period. The estimated cost of either form of the barrier proposed by Caltrans is just over \$1 million.

This simple estimation does not take into account the multiplier effect (where dollars earned are spent throughout the economy and gain value), nor does it consider the increased earning potential of the hundreds of students that Matt assisted in finding more promising educational and career opportunities. It also does not take into account the lifetime earnings and tax revenue potential of the other 45 lives that have been lost, or the cost of providing search and rescue personnel and equipment for the recovery efforts. Of course, no price can be placed on the

intangible joys that Matt and other victims of the bridge brought to the lives of their families and friends, or the devastating grief experienced by the loved ones left behind.

In short, spending a million dollars to prevent future loss of life at Cold Spring Bridge might be one of the better bargains offered to California taxpayers in the coming years. Please support the construction of the suicide barrier at this deadly bridge.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lynn Hamilton

cc: Karen Aydelott Robbins