

Good morning Chairman Firestone, Board members and all those present. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you in support of the Caltrans project to build a suicide prevention barrier for the Cold Spring Arch Bridge.

My name is Karen Aydelott and I am the mother of this bridge's 46th death. There is no way to find words adequate to express the heartache my family has and will endure. The loss a child is truly beyond comprehension.

However, I stand before you today, because I want the number 46 to have a face and a soul and humanity as you consider this very important and necessary project.

How in less than three minutes to a room of strangers do I convey the value of a life and the terrible and heartbreaking loss of a split second decision made by a person when for that brief moment the world is so black that logic is out of reach?

I want you to know that Matthew was a beautiful and precocious child. He was graced with a gift for humor and wit and an amazing capacity for story telling, which he could also put to paper with ease and fluidity. His capacity for giving of himself to his friends and family were legendary – such wonderful stories were told by his many friends at his memorial service.

He kept his personal pain inside, but he spread a very special – his own form – of joy to so many. He treasured his friends, his family – especially his brother, Nathan - and his colleagues and the young people he worked with at Cuesta Community College.

For ten years he had an enormous impact on the Cuesta students with whom he worked. I cannot tell you how many of these individuals – have spoken to me in the days after Matthew's death to tell me that Matthew changed the direction of their lives. They left no doubt that they will always be grateful for having known Matthew. Matthew's work changed lives – so that there are now a bevy – probably well over 500 young people – who will be contributing and responsible citizens because Matthew touched their lives.

Who is to say how many more students would have been touched by my son's ability to bring the best out of each individual? Matthew's students brought a special form of delight and reward to him that truly mattered. It was of the utmost importance to Matthew that he make a difference in the lives of others. Who can possibly put a value on one person's life, let alone the value of so many lives changed for the better?

We know that Matthew's momentary decision was entirely unplanned and very last minute and that his awful descent into darkness was very sudden. There is no reason to doubt that had the deputies been able to reach him in time; had there been a barrier causing him to pause long enough or not even have access to such a quick and permanent way to end his awful and suddenly encompassing pain, he would be still with us today - well on the path back to peace and once again making his most meaningful contributions to the well-being of others.

And this consideration does not even add the love and special gifts this caring and insightful man brought to his family and friends to this equation of value that has been raised as if a valid issue by which to justify whether or not to build the barrier on this bridge. How can that possibly be – when the potential for saving many more lives is in your hands?

That he should be judged as a lost soul or not worthy of helping because for a moment he could not see his way out from the darkness and pain - that would be a very sad commentary on the values of our society.

Thank you on behalf of Matthew and his family for supporting this very important public safety issue to build a barrier for the Cold Spring Arch Bridge.