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Barriers To Suicide Act

Installing Barriers in High-Risk Areas is Critical to Suicide Prevention

Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States, with over 49,000 deaths in 2023, or about one death every 11 minutes. Suicide rates rose by over 37 percent from 2000-2022. Between 2010 and 2020, 11,154 Americans lost their lives through suicide-by-jumping. And although railway suicides represent only about 1% of total suicides, they pose unique challenges in their difficulty of prevention, significant lethality, and broader secondary impacts on train operators, other passengers, emergency responders, and more. Data shows that restricting access to lethal means allows people to move out of fatal moments of crisis. One effective measure to prevent suicide-by-jumping and suicides at high-risk areas is the construction of barriers or nets on high-risk structures, such as bridges, buildings, parking garages, and at rail stations and crossings.

In 2003, Toronto installed barriers at its deadliest bridge, which had seen an average of nine suicides per year. Over the next decade, suicides dropped to nearly zero. When D.C. authorities installed fencing at the Duke Ellington Bridge over Rock Creek Park in Northwest D.C., suicides fell by 90%, with no increase in attempts at nearby bridges. The most widely-known example of this type of project is the continuous, 1.7-mile barrier completed in 2024 on the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco – a hotspot for jumping deaths. The net at the Golden Gate Bridge reduced the annual suicide rate at the bridge by 73% in the year it was completed, down from an average of 30 suicides per year to 8 that year. However, most states and localities lack the resources to fund barriers and nets to prevent suicide deaths from bridges.

The Barriers to Suicide Act would help states proactively prevent suicide-by-jumping attempts by:

1. Establishing a competitive grant program for states and localities to apply for federal funding to build safety nets and barriers on bridges, buildings, parking garages, and at rail stations and highway-rail grade rail crossings, with the goal of preventing suicides.
2. This legislation would also make these types of projects eligible under the National Highway Performance Program and would authorize a federal study to look at other types of structures that attract high numbers of suicide-by-jumping deaths, types of nets and barriers that are effective at those locations, and other methods of reducing these types of death by suicide.