



**THE CENTER FOR POLICY, ADVOCACY, AND EDUCATION
OF THE MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK CITY**

July 3, 2013

Mr. David Samson
Chairman, Port Authority of NY&NJ

Dear Mr. Samson,

On behalf of MHA-NYC, **I am writing in support of the proposal to install bridge barriers on the George Washington Bridge as a means of preventing suicides.** This proposal is one component of a larger proposal to improve bicycle and pedestrian access across the George Washington Bridge.

George Washington Bridge suicides had been averaging ten per year. In 2012 they spiked to 18 suicides with 45 attempts. **Research clearly demonstrates that installing bridge barriers** or otherwise restricting access to popular jump sites, like the George Washington Bridge, **effectively prevent suicides.** In fact, in a 2006 report analyzing appropriate suicide prevention approaches in “suicide hotpots”, including bridges, it was noted that *“the most effective form of prevention at jumping sites is a physical barrier which literally restricts access to the drop”*.

This type of suicide prevention approach includes incorporating architecturally unobtrusive barriers into the original design of high bridges and/or retrofitting bridges that are currently popular jump sites. Given the Port Authority’s upcoming overhaul of the George Washington Bridge starting in 2014, there is an important and timely opportunity to install bridge barriers.

MHA-NYC has been a major voice for the cause of mental health for over 40 years. Among its many programs, MHA-NYC operates LifeNet, New York City’s only multicultural crisis center operating 24/7 with mental health professionals providing free behavioral health assessments, interventions, and support. Bridge phones across NYC are directed to this hotline when individuals in crisis pick up the phone.

As a leader in promoting lifesaving means, **MHA-NYC strongly supports the installation of barriers on the George Washington Bridge as an effective means of preventing suicides.**

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Williams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kimberly Williams, LMSW
Director, Center for Policy, Advocacy, and Education

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