

OUR MISSION

To prevent suicide through training, education, advocacy, and support of suicide loss survivors.

Building Hope: Suicide Prevention Barriers Save Lives

“Former University of Minnesota student Kayla Gaebel, age 29, died by suicide on Nov. 9. She had a fiancé, two young children, and multiple career opportunities.”

– University of Minnesota Daily, 1/29/2024

Dear Minnesota Legislator,

The tragic loss of Kayla Gaebel to suicide underscores a growing concern affecting an increasing number of Americans. Last year saw record-high rates of suicide deaths, with current data and statistics indicating another potential record year in 2024. According to the Minnesota Department of Health State Suicide Prevention Plan:



Kayla Gaebel

*“In 2021, 808 Minnesotans lost their lives to suicide. From 2011 to 2021, suicide, or intentional self-harm, was the eighth leading cause of death in Minnesota. Moreover, the number and rate of suicide deaths in Minnesota have been consistently increasing since 1999 ... **Suicide is a significant public health issue that involves the tragic loss of human life as well as agonizing grief, fear, and confusion in families and communities.**”*

The cause of suicide is complex, and there is no single solution. However, there is a singular opportunity **right now** to save lives being lost to suicide. This opportunity comes in the form of **installing suicide prevention barriers** and other effective interventions, like lighting, crisis signage, and emergency call boxes, on the **Washington Avenue Bridge**.

According to the Hennepin County Water Patrol, in 2023, most Hennepin County bridge deaths involved the Washington Avenue Bridge. Numerous sources estimate between 3 and 5 suicide deaths on this bridge per year over the past decade. Due to poor availability of surveillance data, the actual number of deaths may be higher, with the number of suicide attempts likely to be significantly higher, and plans to die by suicide on the Washington Avenue Bridge higher yet.

The Washington Avenue Bridge has become a suicide “hot spot” that demands we appropriate the necessary resources to install suicide prevention barriers and other suicide prevention interventions this Session.

When done properly, utilizing experts and best practices, installing barriers on bridges and other tall structures prevents suicide deaths. Not only do barriers interrupt plans to attempt suicide, but they also allow more time for emergency responders to intervene.

It's a common misconception that those at immediate risk of suicide will substitute one lethal mean for another if the initial method is inaccessible. Research consistently dispels this myth. Additionally, the risk for future suicide decreases significantly after successful intervention during a suicide attempt.

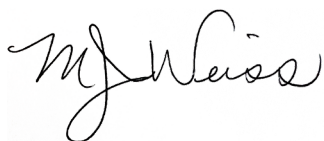
Currently, the University of Minnesota is seeking \$15 million for improvements and renovations to the Washington Avenue Bridge. As part of this effort, the University is committed to installing suicide prevention barriers and additional interventions utilizing best practices on the bridge.

To support the University in its efforts, we believe that any appropriation for improvements and renovations to the Washington Avenue Bridge must include:

- Specific language designating that suicide prevention barriers (railings, fencing, nets, etc.) must be installed on the Washington Avenue Bridge using a minimum of 10% of any final dollar amount appropriated to the University of Minnesota. These funds will be exclusive of any design costs for suicide prevention barriers.
- Specific language stating that suicide prevention organizations and experts in the field of suicide prevention must be consulted during the design and implementation of suicide prevention barriers on the Washington Avenue Bridge to ensure utilization of best practices.

The second leading cause of death of people between the ages of 10 and 24 is suicide. Nearly 70% of University of Minnesota students are within this age demographic. ***While there are many bridges in Minnesota that should be assessed for suicide risk, there is no bridge more urgently in need of these barriers than the University of Minnesota Washington Avenue Bridge.***

We respectfully seek your support of the University of Minnesota's request for \$15 million for repairs and improvements to the Washington Avenue Bridge, including language within this request specifically designating a percentage of funds is used for suicide prevention bridge barriers.



M.J. Weiss

Mother of Kayla Rae Gaebel
8/16/1994-11/9/2023



Gina Morgan

Aunt of Kayla Rae Gaebel



Brittani Senser

Mother of Aria Joy Burch-Senser
3/21/2005-2/6/2019



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