

Good evening, I hope to keep my testimony short, and to an important point often trivialized by being treated with the other statistics in the discussion of barriers to prevent bridge suicides. Others will describe the effectiveness of the barrier proposal and compare them to other interventions. I will only bring three statistics, numbers really, to your attention, in a hope to make this statement as compelling as possible.

My name is John Patton. I am the proud father of SGT Matthew Scott Patton who served with honor in the United States Army from 2008 until his death 11 years and two days ago – May 13 2013. My wife, Lynn, and I are proud of his service, but immensely saddened by his loss.

The first number that I want to bring to your attention is ELEVEN. ELEVEN years ago this past Monday on the day after Mother's Day, Matthew chose, as much as anyone in his mental state at the time chooses, to end his own life. ELEVEN years that Lynn and I have missed our young man. ELEVEN years that he hasn't dated, held a job, lost a job, gotten married or raised children. ELEVEN years that his siblings, Evan, Joshua and Caley have not been able to laugh or cry with their brother. ELEVEN years that we've had to worry about each other in the wake of the preventable tragedy that befell our family. ELEVEN

23. My second number. 23 is how old Matthew was when he took his life. That is how old he will always be. There is no changing that, there are no life events, no weddings, no grandchildren, no cookouts, no parades, no summers or winters, no tinkering on the Subaru with his friends, no vacations. His grandparents lived into their 90's, so I estimate Matthew was robbed of nearly 3 quarters of his life. Everyone was. 23

Last number: ONE. ELEVEN and 23 are powerful numbers for Lynn & I. But ONE, that is the number that I really want you to take away with you tonight. Look at the Active Duty suicide data for 2013. The Department of Defense reports (Smolenski, 2014) that there were 289 active duty members who took their lives that year. [That one is not on the list and won't be on the test]. That's a pretty big number - 5.5 per week, 24 per month. Now take a look at how many sons died by suicide in the Patton family. ONE. Not 5.5, not 24, not 289, but ONE. So the math is confusing, because we are taught that one is less than 289 - but not for Lynn & I, not when it comes to harm reduction efforts. And it isn't for anyone who loses a child, parent, spouse, or friend to suicide. ONE

Matthew was able to take his life, despite counseling, despite availability of hot lines, because he had access to the means to do so and, at the time, an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness. Do we wish that

those earlier interventions had been effective for him? YES, but the reality is that they are not always effective, and they are not omnipresent. Gun locks and drug lock bags reduce access to lethal means in the home - slowing or eliminating access to lethal means is a recognized intervention for those in crisis. Barriers are the *only* tool that can virtually ELIMINATE access for those who might decide to die from a bridge.

Consider the pain and anguish of SGT Patton's mother and father and the others who will testify about the pain of their loss, or the pain they were suffering and how an intervention like the barriers we are discussing today might have helped. Consider the effort that they had to go through just to keep going. Consider their brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends. Consider the pain and anguish of families who have lost, or importantly, will lose loved ones from one of these bridges. Imagine attending a funeral for one of your constituents who died from one of these four bridges.

So I ask that as you consider this legislation, remember that the math is confusing. Weigh whatever is on the cost side of the barriers: aesthetics, cost of installing a structurally sound system, increased effort to maintain the bridges AND the barriers. Add them all up. Then compare that cost to just a single family that has to go through what we have for ELEVEN years. ONE is the bigger number. Please make these barriers a reality to prevent a tragedy such as Matthew's. ONE. Thank you for your time.