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February 26, 2007

Cheers * To the State Bridge Authority for taking an enlightened approach to the challenge of preventing suicides. Instead of installing physical barriers, which have a mixed record of effectiveness, the authority is taking an educational approach to the challenge. The issue is very real, as demonstrated by recent suicides and attempts. The authority will install hot line phones connected to mental health clinics and join with organizations in the area already working on suicide prevention.

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Gannett Newspaper Friday, May 25, 2007

Emergency bridge phones may save lives

To their credit, state Bridge Authority officials have moved quickly to install emergency phone lines along the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge to help minimize suicide attempts on the 250-foot-high span.

The move was in reaction to two suicides off the bridge within days of each other in December. The deaths prompted a review that culminated in a decision in February to install the suicide prevention telephone lines on that span and three others - the Newburgh-Beacon, the Rip Van Winkle and Bear Mountain bridges. Another person committed suicide off the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge in April. The Bear Mountain Bridge will have phones installed next.

Such phones have been effective on the Mid-Hudson Bridge for more than two decades. Those call boxes go directly to a 24-hour help line, where distraught people can speak to a mental health counselor. More than 50 people have used them and have been persuaded not to jump. Seven people have jumped during that time, but only one of them used the phone.

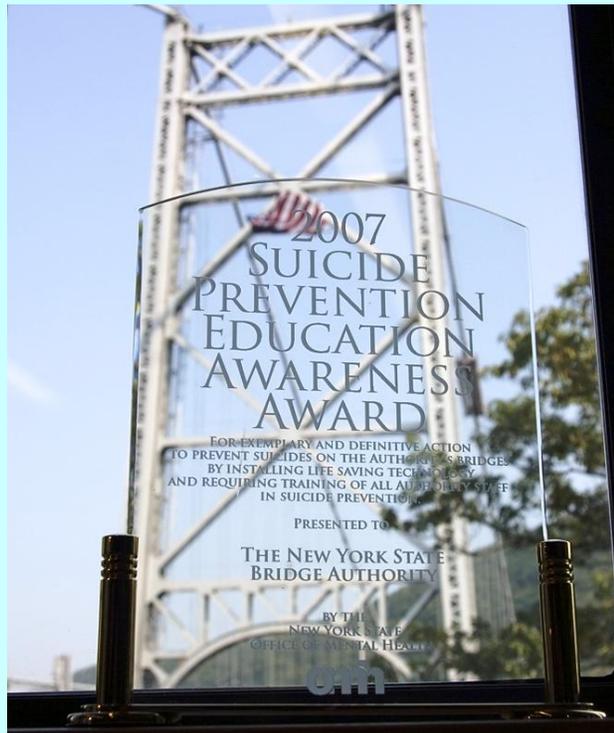
The telephone connection used on the Mid-Hudson Bridge couldn't be replicated on the other bridges. So officials put together a variety of technologies to create the systems. Calls will be routed through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which connects calls to the nearest 24-hour-a-day mental health clinic. The cost to install the phones is not expected to exceed \$166,000. That's a small price to pay for these potentially life-saving devices.

Bridge Authority officials rightfully sought to do what they could to prevent future attempts after the tragedies in December.

Surely, the phones alone won't stop all suicides. And much more needs to be done to erase the stigma surrounding mental illness that often deters people from seeking help when they most need it. Still, the phones could be a much-needed lifeline for those on the bridge feeling they have no other choice but to take their own life.

When it seems like there's no hope, there is help. **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

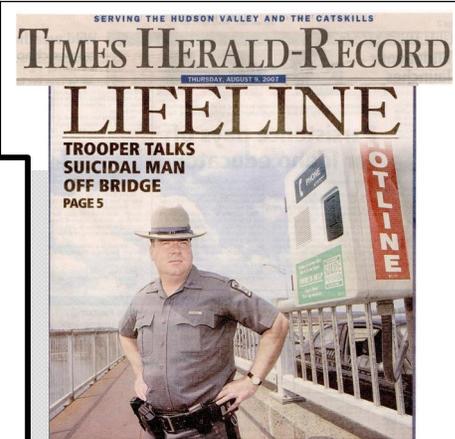
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Sponsored by the NYSBA



2/14/07 Kingston Daily Freeman
Phones aim to prevent bridge jumps

Times Herald-Record February 23, 2007
Bridge Authority will increase education, provide cell phones to prevent suicide...

Wednesday, 9.26.2007 Poughkeepsie Journal on-line
Bridge Authority recognized for suicide prevention



"The Office of Mental Health applauds the Bridge Authority for promoting suicide awareness, and directly connecting individuals to Lifeline so they can get the help they need." - *Michael F. Hogan, PhD*, Commissioner of the NYS Office of Mental Health