

Civil Liability for Suicide Barriers

*by Mary Reiten and David J. Jung**

Abstract

Many bridges in various states and countries, including the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, have been used by people to commit suicide. This paper examines whether a public entity that administers a bridge would be exposed to liability for damages if it installed a suicide barrier and the barrier failed in some manner, allowing a member of the public to commit suicide. It concludes that where public property has been the site of suicides in the past, building a barrier or taking other steps to prevent future suicides would not expose the entity administering the property to significant liability. Further, if someone were injured in attempting suicide, and argued that the barrier increased the risk of harm to them because it was negligently designed or constructed, the public entity's liability would be no broader than it would be for any other improvement to public property.

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