

Coalition for Suicide Prevention in Public Infrastructure Launches National Effort to Make Public Structures Safer

Suicide loss survivors, key members of Congress, industry & nonprofit leaders support Coalition effort to embed suicide prevention in nation's infrastructure.

BLOOMINGTON, MN, UNITED STATES, August 14, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Two mothers who turned unimaginable loss into advocacy have launched a new national effort to prevent suicide from tall public structures. [The Coalition for Suicide Prevention in Public Infrastructure](#), co-founded by [Trish Merele and M.J. Weiss Blair](#) with the support of SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education), is calling for a nationwide shift in how bridges, overpasses, and similar structures are designed—with suicide prevention as a core feature, not an afterthought.

"I lost my 17-year-old son John at the Natchez Trace Parkway Bridge in Tennessee in 2016," said Trish Merele, Coalition Co-Chair, "It was then that I learned just how many people had also died by suicide at that location. As difficult as it was to speak out, I couldn't rationalize waiting for someone else to do something. Working with other families, local advocates, state, and federal officials, we succeeded in having temporary barriers installed, with permanent barriers expected to begin construction in 2026. The bridge will finally be safer for everyone. This coalition is about expanding that hope nationwide."

Trish's story is not an isolated one. Across the country, families are stepping forward to turn their pain into purpose. And while the loss of a loved one to suicide is life-altering, their stories also offer a roadmap for change and proof that persistence, partnership, and policy reform can save



**COALITION FOR
SUICIDE
PREVENTION
IN PUBLIC
INFRASTRUCTURE**

Building hope into every structure

Coalition for Suicide Prevention in Public Infrastructure

lives.

“When my daughter Kayla died in 2023 at the Washington Avenue Bridge in Minnesota, I discovered she was one of several people lost there over the years,” said M.J. Weiss Blair, Coalition Co-Chair. “I knew we couldn’t wait any longer. We pushed for—and secured—temporary barriers that saved lives. Then we worked with state lawmakers and partners to secure \$8 million in public funding for permanent barriers. Change is possible when we demand it and when we do it together.”

The announcement of the coalition’s formation was made at the Willis Towers Watson (WTW) Charity Golf Tournament benefiting SAVE, held on July 15, 2025. WTW has been a key national partner in SAVE’s work, including the creation of IBEAM (Ideal Body Environment and Mind)—a mental health and suicide prevention initiative developed specifically for the construction industry, which experiences one of the highest suicide rates of any profession.

WTW also played a critical role in SAVE’s successful advocacy to secure \$8 million in funding for permanent suicide prevention barriers on the Washington Avenue Bridge in Minnesota.



Trish Merele, Co-Founder, Coalition for Suicide Prevention Public Infrastructure

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Congressman Don Beyer (D-VA)

“This partnership has united our people from across the country to support a mission that matters deeply,” said Brian Carpenter, Managing Director, Willis Towers Watson. “We’re proud to stand alongside SAVE and now this national coalition, knowing that our collective efforts are helping to make public spaces safer and lives more protected. This is about compassion, responsibility, and leading with purpose in an industry that’s been deeply impacted by suicide.”

A national leader in the construction industry, Austin Industries, also lauded the formation of the coalition. Matt

Hollensworth, Director of Chaplain Services, Austin Industries said:

“At Austin Industries, safety is more than a protocol, it’s a promise. We recognize that mental health is a critical part of that promise, especially in the construction industry where the suicide

rate is alarmingly high. That's why we're proud to support the Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) initiative. Together, we're working to break the silence, build awareness, and create a culture where asking for help is seen as strength."

Congressman Don Beyer (D-VA) who, along with Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) has introduced the [Barriers to Suicide Act](#), applauded the new coalition.

"I am glad to see this coalition come together to raise awareness about suicide prevention barriers and similar infrastructure changes we should be implementing today. Suicide prevention is such an important issue, and we should be doing everything in our power to address infrastructure where we know there are risks or a history of suicide. I wholeheartedly support this group's mission and hope the Coalition is able to bring about meaningful and long-needed change."

Congressman Fitzpatrick made it clear that the Barriers to Suicide Act is a solution that can save lives.

"More than 1,000 lives are lost to suicide on our railways each year. In our community, that crisis recently took three of our own—one to suicide, and two more in a brave attempt to save him. It was a devastating loss that shook us to our core," said Rep. Fitzpatrick. "We can't accept tragedy as the cost of inaction—not when solutions exist. That's why Representative Beyer and I are introducing the Barriers to Suicide Act. As Co-Chair of the Bipartisan Mental Health Task Force, I'm working to equip communities with funding for proven life-saving barriers at rail stations and other high-risk sites. We can't bring back those we lost—but we can act in their memory, and we can save lives with the tools we know work."

Tony Coder, Executive Director of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, underscored the power of barriers to save lives.



MJ Weiss Blair, Co-Founder, Coalition for Suicide Prevention in Public Infrastructure



Willis Towers Watson

“Installing suicide prevention barriers is a proven and compassionate measure we can take to save lives. We have seen barriers used effectively in Ohio to prevent suicide. With this federal bill, funding will support more communities nationwide to take meaningful action. Making sure bridges and other high structures are equipped with barriers could make the difference between a crisis and an irreversible tragedy.”

The coalition begins with the leadership of Merelo and Weiss Blair, in partnership with SAVE, one of the nation’s leading suicide prevention organizations.

Together, they are building a broad-based national effort to advocate for smarter infrastructure policy, expand public awareness, and protect lives through hope-driven action.

Coalition’s Initial Priorities Include:

- Passage of the Barriers to Suicide Act – Bipartisan federal legislation to create a national grant program for suicide prevention barriers on high-risk structures such as bridges, buildings, parking garages, and rail platforms
 - Support for state and local policies requiring suicide prevention design reviews in all new or reconstructed public structures
 - Dedicated public, private, and philanthropic funding to ensure physical safety measures become standard—not optional—in infrastructure planning
 - Storytelling and awareness campaigns to inform safer design and empower communities to advocate for solutions
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Each year, the United States invests over \$400 billion in public infrastructure, yet suicide remains a leading cause of death—particularly among youth and working-age adults. Research shows that barriers work: over 90% of people prevented at high-risk locations do not go on to die by suicide elsewhere.

“This is preventable. This is fixable. This is urgent. But most of all—this is hopeful,” said Erich Mische, CEO of SAVE, “We’re not waiting for tragedy to strike again. We’re acting now with the leadership of families who’ve already endured the unthinkable and the resolve to ensure no other family has to. This coalition is about building a future where every life is treated as worth protecting through advocacy, policy, and smart, compassionate design.”



The Coalition for Suicide Prevention in Public Infrastructure is in its formative stages and actively invites survivors, engineers, policy leaders, funders, and advocates to join the movement. To learn more or get involved, visit <http://cspipi.org/> or contact SAVE CEO Erich Mische at emische@save.org

Erich Mische

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