

The testimony I provide will not be easy for you to hear; but I am compelled to relate the constant nightmare we victims of the Quechee Gorge Bridge (QGB) relive if not on a daily basis, then with each new death that occurs at this bridge.

On the morning of July 4th, 2011, a firefighter named Derek Cooper went to the QGB.

According to a witness, Derek climbed over the railing, and attempted to climb back over to the roadside. But Derek couldn't pull himself over the top railing on this bridge because the railing is curved in such a way, at such an angle, that does not allow people to pull themselves back up and over to the roadside. There are no second chances with this bridge.

Derek was an athletic, extremely physically fit 21 year old firefighter, who could use the jaws of life easily to cut victims from tangled automobile accidents; yet he couldn't lift himself up over the curved railing of this bridge to save his own life. Unable to pull his legs and body back over the curved top railing, Derek slipped and fell in 3.5 seconds the equivalent of 14 stories to his death below. This would mean Derek's death was a preventable fall, not a jump.

There wasn't much left of Derek that was intact. His fellow firefighters, who he had trained with, who he grew up with, had to retrieve his body.

Derek Cooper is one of my identical twin sons.

My son's death, like all the deaths at this bridge over the past 80 or more years, were wrong, were preventable; and caused by a fall from a poorly designed bridge.

Every time there is a fall at this bridge, first responders dispatch equipment down 14 stories to the base of the Quechee gorge. While any method of rescue places first responders in danger, the risk of danger at this location involves hauling equipment down the gorge, possible swift water search and rescue, then hauling the remains back up the gorge. Saving DOT dollars or saving scenery for tourists is not a valid justification over the safety and lives of first responders.

Furthermore, we cannot account for post traumatic counseling any witnesses or first responders must go through after watching someone die or retrieving what is left of a body.

There are blogs on the Internet and many news stories in which people speak of witnessing deaths at this bridge. Signs have been posted on the bridge as a suicide prevention effort. But this effort along with a part time mental health counselor have done nothing to dissuade suicide attempts. The most recent death, and subsequent attempts further compound continued and growing outcry against the state for not fixing the bridge.

If we were talking about an intersection with an annual rate of one vehicular fatality a year, or, a crosswalk in front of a school with one pedestrian death per year; there would be no hesitation nor debate about fixing this site. Yet statistically, over the course of decades, the QGB has annual death rates that state government agencies choose to ignore. For years, plans to fix this location drop to the bottom of the state's construction list. My son's life, and the lives of the other victims, are dismissed as demonstrated by this state a lack of willingness to accept responsibility and vision to fix this dangerous location.

Every death at this bridge, whether a previous or future death, is wrongful, is preventable, and is entirely in the hands of this state. It is the responsibility of this state to fix this location, so no other family has to go through what my family goes through with every new death at the Quechee Gorge Bridge. Thank you.

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