



# Milwaukee County Office of the Sheriff

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## NEWS RELEASE

**David A. Clarke Jr.**  
*Sheriff*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **Milwaukee County Sheriff David A. Clarke Jr. Calls on State DOT (via letter to Secretary Busalacchi) to Erect a Suicide Prevention Barrier on Milwaukee's Hoan Bridge as a Part of 2011-2012 Remodel**

**Milwaukee, WI** – After review and analysis of the Hoan Bridge being a popular location for suicide jumpers, Milwaukee County Sheriff David A. Clarke Jr. sent a letter yesterday to WISDOT Secretary Frank Busalacchi calling on him to consider erecting a suicide prevention barrier on the City of Milwaukee Hoan Bridge (I-794). It is a sobering fact that over the past decade, 16 suicidal deaths have taken place from the bridge; two other subjects have been “talked down” from the ledge; and one Milwaukeean who survived the deadly plunge.

Excerpts from the letter to Secretary Busalacchi are as follows:

*The psychology of those who seek to end their lives by jumping to their deaths is startling. That behavior appears to belong to a special subset of the suicidal: the so-called “passion” category of those whose acts appear “...born of an immediate crisis, with little or no forethought involved.” Experts in the field posit that similar to those who commit acts of homicide, a large percentage of the suicidal are more likely to turn to means that are immediately available; are easy, quick, and likely to produce a final outcome. In short, the research shows that those for whom suicide is an impulsive act, as opposed to a cumulative act, jumping is the likely methodology that they will employ.*

*While it contradicts conventional thinking regarding suicide: A bridge barrier doesn't just drive suicidal subjects to pursue an alternative methods: It decreases suicides within that very population of impulsive subjects, as an excerpt from the staggering article *The Urge to End it All* by New York Times author Scott Anderson explains.*

*I note that in May of this year, work began on a suicide-prevention fence for Seattle's Aurora Bridge. The 8'9" fence around the rim of the bridge has been designed to*

*discourage people from jumping. More than 230 people jumped to their deaths since the bridge opened in 1932. In December 2006, six emergency phones and 18 signs were installed on the bridge to encourage people to seek help instead of jumping. But officials in Seattle saw the propriety of a physical intervention as the key. Similarly, the Prince Edward Viaduct in Toronto is a hotspot for suicidal subjects. This prompted the construction of a suicide barrier.*

*Might a similar tactic be employed here at the Hoan?*

*Washington's State Department of Transportation has pegged the cost of the project at \$4.6 million. The construction in Toronto was completed at a cost of \$5.5 million. Scary numbers, perhaps. But the costs of the suicides that continue to occur are not merely emotional; although for the families of the deceased that cost is great We in law enforcement, including the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office, Milwaukee Police Department, United States Coast Guard, and the Milwaukee Fire Department continue to expend our resources in intervening in those suicide attempts in which we can. In those in which we cannot, we must spend our energies in the aftermath of these events, in investigative time at both the patrol and detective levels. Most often, these tragic events force closures of the expressway and waterway, snarling traffic through this artery during morning and evening rush hours.*

*I note that the initial portion of the re-decking of the Hoan Bridge is currently underway, and slated for completion by mid-November. The Department of Transportation is reported to be collecting proposals related to the project to rebuild the entire bridge roadway surface, and in fact doing a full inspection of the bridge that will be complete by the end of the year. Costs associated with my proposal might properly become a portion of that rebuilding project.*

*Secretary Busalacchi, I ask that you consider this issue, and that you advise me of your thoughts on the matter. I am interested to know what potential remedies, if any, you suggest... I do not fall into the camp that accepts the position "...there's really not much that we can do about it. We can have an impact, and have an obligation to act when the data reveals a point to potentially sever the chain of causality in a suicidal subject. I believe that a physical intervention is called for in this instance. Let's not let the Hoan Bridge continue to be a magnet for those who wish to end their lives.*

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