

1 SENATE MEMORIAL 103

2 **53RD LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2018**

3 INTRODUCED BY

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10 A MEMORIAL

11 REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO MOVE FORWARD
12 WITH SAFETY MEASURES AT THE RIO GRANDE GORGE BRIDGE, TO PROVIDE
13 SUICIDE BARRIERS ON THE BRIDGE AND TO CREATE SAFE ACCESSIBILITY
14 TO THE BRIDGE FOR ALL VISITORS THAT IS COMPLIANT WITH THE
15 FEDERAL AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990.

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17 WHEREAS, the Rio Grande Gorge bridge was designed in 1963
18 and was completed in 1965; and

19 WHEREAS, the Rio Grande Gorge bridge has pedestrian
20 walkways with forty-seven-inch railings; and

21 WHEREAS, the Rio Grande Gorge bridge has become an
22 "attractive nuisance" that can tempt persons with suicidal
23 thoughts to jump to their deaths; and

24 WHEREAS, this was underscored in 2016 by the death of a
25 fourteen-year-old boy who jumped from the bridge; and

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1 WHEREAS, fourteen people have committed suicide at the Rio
2 Grande Gorge bridge since 2012, an average of two and one-half
3 deaths from suicide a year; and

4 WHEREAS, a total of forty-two deaths from suicide at the
5 Rio Grande Gorge bridge have been recorded by the office of the
6 state medical investigator; and

7 WHEREAS, the suicide rate in Taos county is higher than
8 the state average, and suicides at the Rio Grande Gorge bridge
9 account for fifty percent of all suicides in the Taos county
10 area; and

11 WHEREAS, the number of suicides at the Rio Grande Gorge
12 bridge detrimentally affects community morale; and

13 WHEREAS, recovery efforts from the Rio Grande Gorge drain
14 emergency and law enforcement resources, are physically
15 dangerous and create emotional and mental stress for emergency
16 responders; and

17 WHEREAS, the Rio Grande Gorge bridge has historically been
18 a tourist destination, and its international visibility was
19 enhanced when it was included in the Rio Grande del Norte
20 national monument created in 2013; and

21 WHEREAS, the Rio Grande del Norte national monument
22 attracts an average of three hundred thousand visitors yearly,
23 most of whom visit the Rio Grande Gorge bridge, creating a
24 level of traffic and pedestrian traffic possibly not
25 contemplated in the original design; and

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1 WHEREAS, designed and built in the 1960s, the Rio Grande
2 Gorge bridge is not easily accessible for people with
3 disabilities and does not meet the standards for structures
4 under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; and

5 WHEREAS, heightened barriers have proven to be successful
6 suicide deterrents at bridges throughout the United States,
7 including the Memorial bridge in Maine, the Vista bridge in
8 Oregon and the Cold Spring Canyon bridge in California; and

9 WHEREAS, the Taos county board of county commissioners
10 adopted a resolution regarding safety at the Rio Grande Gorge
11 bridge and supporting the efforts of both the United States
12 department of transportation and the state department of
13 transportation to allocate funding for the design and
14 installation of protective safety measures at the bridge; and

15 WHEREAS, the Taos county resolution states that: "Towards
16 this end, Taos County desires to work collaboratively with the
17 State of New Mexico, Federal agencies, Town of Taos, Taos
18 Municipal School District and local non-profits such as the
19 Gorge Bridge Safety Network, to fund improvements at the
20 Bridge, in order to ensure greater safety and the prevention of
21 suicide"; and

22 WHEREAS, the department of transportation has previously
23 produced a report titled "Structural Feasibility Analysis, Rio
24 Grande Gorge Bridge Suicide Deterrent System, January 2015"
25 that identified five alternatives regarding public safety at

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1 the bridge; and

2 WHEREAS, on June 7, 2017, the department of transportation
3 awarded a contract to the engineering firm HDR to create a
4 structural analysis for three of the identified alternatives:
5 "no build", replacement of the existing forty-seven-inch
6 railing with an eight-foot railing and the installation of a
7 horizontal net system;

8 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE
9 OF NEW MEXICO that the department of transportation be
10 requested to continue to work toward the installation of bridge
11 barriers, safety-enhancing improvements and modifications to
12 comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 to the
13 Rio Grande Gorge bridge on United States highway 64 in Taos
14 county; and

15 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department of
16 transportation report the findings of the structural analysis
17 by HDR to the appropriate legislative interim committee prior
18 to that committee's final meeting in 2018; and

19 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
20 transmitted to the secretary of transportation and the
21 secretary of public safety.