

ESPC Stands in Solidarity with Wyoming's LGBTQ+ Community

Hate is not a Wyoming value.

We shouldn't have to say that hate is not a Wyoming value, but a violently homophobic shirt being sold at a Cheyenne bar, a transgender woman beaten at a dog park in Casper, a magician receiving death threats at the library in Gillette, and fear and intimidation at high schools in Natrona County and Powell serve as a stark reminder that we need to say this—and continue saying it. And we are heartbroken that we do.

“Are you safe?” is the question friends and family are asking Wyoming Equality Executive Director Sara Burlingame. A question she did not answer for obvious reasons in her recent [Wyoming Tribune Eagle editorial](#).

We stand in solidarity with our ESPC coalition partners Wyoming Equality and the Matthew Shepard Foundation, as well Wyoming AIDS assistance, and the people across Wyoming raising their voices to say that love is stronger than hate. So many Wyomingites are quick to highlight that Wyoming is the Equality State.

When are we going to live into this motto?

Our LGBTQ+ friends and family live with hate on a regular basis and all too often the price is paid in lives lost.

According to the 2018 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, in 2015, Wyoming High School students who self-identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual were significantly more likely to report they had seriously considered attempting suicide (54%) or had attempted suicide (37%) in the past twelve months compared to students who identified as heterosexual (16% and 11% respectively).

Lives are not only lost to suicide, in 1998 Matthew Shepard, a gay college student from Laramie, was beaten to death. This hate crime drew national attention and spurred many failed attempts to pass Hate Crime legislation in Wyoming.

In a recent [Casper Star Tribune article](#) on the subject, Judy Shepard, Matthew's mother and board president of the Matthew Shepard Foundation reminded us, “Wyoming has had 22 years to pass Hate Crime legislation and every year our legislators parrot the line that the Equality State doesn't need this law. It is time for Wyoming to face reality and recognize that we are losing our youth, our economic potential and our soul. The time to take a stand is now, not after another family loses their child.”

We join those of you who are already raising your voices; those who are making change through protest and policy; those who are actively fighting back against hate, violence, and oppression; and **when we stand in solidarity with you—we will succeed together.**

To our allies in this work who see injustice and who are looking for ways to act, we want you to know: **You are making a difference!**

DO Speak up. Speak out. Embody love. Share a message of pride. Support Wyoming Equality [here](#) and the Matthew Shepard Foundation [here](#) and Wyoming AIDS Assistance [here](#). Through their emails and events they will keep you updated on the best ways you can help support our LGBTQ+ friends and family. DON'T circulate images of the shirt or the name of the bar—you'll only drive traffic to them.

"There is no place that I love better than Wyoming. I feel the glacial construction of the Laramide Orogeny in my bones. I don't love Wyoming in a mild way – I'm not built that way," Burlingame's editorial says. "If you love Wyoming, too, and you know that we could be better, I am asking you to not take away the message that the bar agreed to stop carrying that awful shirt, so our work is done here. Our work will be done when people stop asking 'Are you safe there?' when we tell them where we're from."

Together we will show that the Wyoming we know and love in no way supports hate.