I have been so proud of our Bishop and our Diocese for recognizing the importance of addressing a tragedy that continues to sweep across our state, leaving virtually no one untouched: the tragedy of suicide. Wyoming currently ranks #2 in the nation for number of completed suicides per capita. Hoping to change this grim statistic, the Episcopal Suicide Prevention Connection has been working diligently in numerous arenas to provide awareness and training opportunities in suicide prevention and intervention throughout the state. We have been partnered in much of this endeavor with Prevention Management Organization of Wyoming (PMO), the agency currently charged by the state of Wyoming with providing community based suicide prevention services. One of the goals of PMO was to have 10% of Wyoming’s adult population trained in basic suicide prevention techniques by the year 2020. Since we have joined forces with them, 45,000 Wyoming citizens, which represents 8.9% of Wyoming’s adult population, have already received training! More importantly, 44% of these participants reported that they have already used the skills they learned to help someone in crisis. These are not merely numbers; these are people’s lives!

Last week, the Joint Appropriations Committee cut an additional $2.1 million from the Dept. of Health’s Substance Abuse and Suicide Prevention Program for the upcoming year. This morning the Dept. of Health confirmed that, should this cut remain unchallenged, the funds would be taken from Suicide Prevention activities, in addition to the “Wyo. Quit Tobacco” program and a fetal alcohol program on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

The budget bill has not yet hit the Senate and House floors; when it does, there will be budget amendments filed on both sides to restore the $2.1 million. It’s important to remember that this proposed cut is on top of the Governor’s recommended cuts to this program, which are more than $350,000 for next fiscal year. Overall, funding for substance abuse and suicide prevention services has dropped 11% within the last year. This proposed reduction represents an additional 40%; PMO management and administrative costs are already only 8.7%, meaning 92% of available funding goes directly to support work in our communities. A budget cut of the magnitude proposed would thus cripple local prevention efforts and negatively affect our entire prevention system for years to come.

I believe that it is critical for all of us to stand in support of the work we have begun and hope to continue, both as a Diocese and as Wyoming citizens. Legislators need to hear from you! Send a short email or personal telephone call urging your legislators to vote in favor of the budget amendments restoring the $2.1 million; the more public input we can provide, the better our chances of seeing funding reinstated to these critical prevention programs. Don’t hesitate to contact either myself (bcraft@wyoming.com ; 307-389-0150) or PMO Executive Director Keith Hotle (khotle@pmowyo.org ; 307-262-2798) if you have questions or would like further information. The time is short and our input is vital; we need and value your help!

Sincerely and prayerfully,
Rev. Bernadine Craft, Chair, Episcopal Suicide Prevention Connection