



MUNICIPAL EQUALITY INDEX

**SUCCESS STORIES
COMPILATION**

The Story Behind the Score: Success Stories from Across the Country

MISSOURI

By AJ Bockelman

*Executive Director of PROMO,
Missouri's Statewide LGBT Advocacy
Organization, and Board Member of
the Equality Federation*

As Missouri continues to advance, Saint Louis and Kansas City lead the rest of the state as you see indicated in the MEI. As the LGBT community evolved, becoming more open, diverse and interactive with local government, our city infrastructure began to evolve as well. Within the last four years, several of our municipalities in the state have stepped up to recognize not just protections for the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community, many of which were passed in the 1990's, but also ended the exclusion of the transgender community in these protections as well.

While this progress has been great to see, we know that much more work is yet ahead of us. Jefferson City has not even started the process on a municipal level, despite being the nexus for all things political in the state. We hope to see Jefferson City restart their Human Rights Commission and begin the vital work of providing basic protections for all of their citizens.

As we look to the future, we look forward to seeing many more Missouri municipalities reflected in the Index and eventually, the state.

We hope many additional cities, no matter their size or region of the state, will see the many beginning steps they can take to make their city a safe and welcoming environment, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. It all starts with opening up a dialogue and beginning the initial education on what the issues are for the community and why the LGBT community needs to be covered by basic nondiscrimination ordinances.

UTAH

By Brandie Balken

*Executive Director for Equality
Utah, and Secretary of the Board of
Directors of the Equality Federation*

Working for LGBT Equality in a state like Utah can be challenging. Wins seem few and far between, and people, understandably, get disenfranchised. In 2009, after being shut down in another Legislative Session, Equality Utah decided to go local, in a strategic attempt to achieve some tangible successes while educating and empowering our constituents, and engaging them in the process of policy change.

The efficacy of municipal work is clear: Council members are much more willing to hear and act on input they receive from residents. 10 letters to a Council member or

30 people at a Council Meeting is a game changer, which is vastly different from a Senator or Representative's perspective.

The power of municipal work is clear: Residents feel empowered when they carry the message directly to their elected official, and they can actually see the tangible result of their participation in political process. As more and more residents get involved, the visibility and understanding of LGBT equality grows, which also has a positive impact on statewide work long term.

Our statewide effort for inclusive non-discrimination protections now have the support of 15 cities and counties, The Chamber of Commerce, the business community, 73% of the population and both political parties – all thanks to our municipal efforts.

TEXAS

By Chuck Smith

Executive Director of Equality Texas

The City of Austin has long been known as the "progressive" capital of Texas. Austin passed protections for sexual orientation more than 30 years ago; with gender identity/ expression added in 2004. Three years ago, a city/county Hate Crimes Task Force was formed following an assault on two gay men to work

toward “a respectful community free of hate”. The Task Force is implementing systemic changes in how the community responds to bias-motivated crime. In September 2012, the City of Austin formally endorsed the freedom to marry for same-gender couples.

While the City of Fort Worth enacted sexual orientation protections in 2000, the City is accurately described as more conservative than Austin. However, the pace of progress has escalated rapidly in recent years. This progress followed two significant events: the election of openly-gay City Council member Joel Burns in 2007, and the raid of a gay bar known as the Rainbow Lounge in 2009. Council member Burns is well known for his personal anti-bullying “It Gets Better” video. The bar raid gave rise to the formation of Fairness Fort Worth, a grassroots advocacy organization that has positively impacted local policy changes.

Municipal work is especially important in Texas given the less-than-friendly (some would say “hostile”) current composition of the State Legislature. However, the environment for progressive policy change affecting LGBT Texans is considerably more positive at the local level with progressive mayors and/or council majorities in many of the state’s largest cities, including Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, San Antonio and Fort Worth. It is these

local efforts that will provide at least some level of equal protection at the municipal level until we are able to secure full equality statewide.

WASHINGTON

By Marsha Botzer
Secretary, Equal Rights Washington,
&
By Jeff Albertson
Chair of Equal Rights Washington
Education Foundation

Washingtonians are proud that the city of Seattle has earned the highest raw score in the 2012 Municipal Equality Index. Seattle has set a great example for the rest of the country, making sure that its government does everything it can to ensure that its LGBT citizens be treated equally. We are especially proud of the city’s latest accomplishment: approving transgender inclusive health benefits for the City of Seattle’s transgender employees.

In March 2011, representatives from the Seattle Human Rights Commission joined with activists and organizers from local schools, the Seattle Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Commission, Ingersoll Gender Center, QLaw, national organizations, and other Seattle civil rights groups and city commissions to create a remarkable coalition of

experience and action. Together their unity and ability to work with the informed and supportive City Council members resulted in the city adopting a letter to the City Council asking that the transgender exclusions in the city’s health plan be lifted. Several Councilmembers then endorsed the plan to the Health Care Committee, prompting months of negotiations that finally ended in the city adopting transgender inclusive health benefits for its employees, taking effect in January of this year.

Seattle city officials understand the importance of combating the discrimination the city’s transgender employees face in receiving health care. All employees of the City of Seattle are now able to receive the gender-affirming, medically necessary treatment they deserve. Another important reason for a city to adopt a policy such as this one is that transgender individuals who are denied medical coverage because of their gender identity are a higher risk of developing secondary medical conditions.

The addition of transgender inclusive benefits to the city’s health plan is a shining example of how Seattle is leading the way for the rest of the county. With this accomplishment under our belt, we look forward to moving on to new goals to help ensure that all our citizens are treated equally under the law.

VIRGINIA

By James Parrish

Executive Director of Equality Virginia

We have seen our Northern Virginia communities like Arlington and Alexandria pass resolutions and ordinances prohibiting discrimination in the workplace. They're going the extra mile to create an inclusive workplace and it shows in the vibrancy of their LGBT community.

Virginia's Dillon Rule challenges the work we can do at the ground level by keeping the power in the General Assembly. When a locality wants to add a non-discrimination resolution or executive order protecting its LGBT employees, this holds no legal authority at the state level. This aside, at Equality Virginia, we continue encouraging cities and counties to lead the way and build momentum in our General Assembly as we work towards protecting all employees. Not only is a non-discrimination policy the right thing to do, it gives the public and private sectors a competitive edge in recruiting top-talent.

FLORIDA

By Nadine Smith

Executive Director of Equality Florida

When Equality Florida formed 15 years ago, anti-gay conservatives had just seized control of the legislature and Governor's mansion leaving many in our community feeling hopeless about advancing LGBT issues in Florida. To make matters worse, very few local LGBT ordinances existed which meant state legislators had never wrestled with these issues when they were city council members or county commissioners. They felt no sense of accountability to our issues, and many even said outright "There are no gay people in my district."

Yet, despite a continuing anti-gay headwind, we've made tremendous progress in Florida through the passage of over 70 local LGBT policies in every region of our state - from the darkest blue progressive strongholds, to the deep red conservative enclaves. We moved from fighting to explain the existence of bullying for LGBT youth to compelling GOP leadership to pass a statewide bill banning bullying. We were able to secure that victory in such a way that more than 60% of students now go to schools with sexual orientation and gender identity enumerated in their local anti-bullying policy.

Not only is a non-discrimination policy the right thing to do, it gives the public and private sectors a competitive edge in recruiting top-talent.

Today most Florida legislators hail from communities that have pro-LGBT equality legislation in place - making it much more difficult to argue the protections are unnecessary. Perhaps most importantly, the process of passing local ordinances engages people like few other things can. The political becomes intensely personal when your city councilmember is deciding whether to vote for a non-discrimination ordinance or domestic partnership registry. And each success inspires a new wave of activists.

These local victories are crucial to statewide victories - perhaps even more crucial in red states like Florida.

SUCCESS STORY: SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS



When it comes to issues of equality, our nation's cities are leading the charge because we know that prosperous cities gain great economic strength from celebrating and cultivating diversity.

At a time when partisanship too often trumps practical policy in our national and state legislative bodies, municipalities are leading the way on key issues that impact the day-to-day lives of most Americans. When it comes to issues of equality, our nation's cities are leading the charge because we know that prosperous cities gain great economic strength from celebrating and cultivating diversity.

In that regard, **San Antonio is the new face of the American Dream.** As the nation's 7th largest city (as well as one of the fastest growing cities in the United States), San Antonio has taken important steps to ensure there are no second-class citizens. This year we passed a wide-ranging ordinance that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in housing, public accommodations, city contracting, and city employment. I am proud that this improved San Antonio's MEI score from a 48 in 2012 to an 86 in 2013. By taking

this proactive approach, we have made it perfectly clear that San Antonio is a welcoming and inviting city that is ready to compete in the 21st century global economy.

As with other civil rights struggles, the road to inclusion can be challenging, but **history is the ultimate judge.**

I believe that the same principle applies to today's struggle for LGBT equality and it is my hope that generations to come will continue to build upon the progress that has been made to ensure equality under the law for every citizen.

JULIAN CASTRO
Mayor

SUCCESS STORY: MISSOULA, MONTANA



It's called an LGBT movement for a reason. We can and must advance equality at every level of our democracy until LGBT Montanans are treated the same as LGBT Washingtonians.

WHY THE MISSOULA REGISTRY MATTERS

One of my proudest moments in my two years of service on the Missoula City Council came last June, when we voted unanimously to establish a domestic partnership registry. The unanimous part mattered, because it meant my 11 colleagues believe that my relationship is good enough—that same-sex couples deserve the dignity of public recognition like any other couple. With that vote, my colleagues acknowledged that Montana law is unjust, and that the City of Missoula will do everything it can to be a safe, welcoming, and respectful place for all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

LET'S BE HONEST, A DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP REGISTRY DOESN'T SOUND VERY SEXY

It doesn't carry as much weight as full marriage equality, or even civil unions at the state level. So why even bother doing it?

HERE'S WHY

- It's called an LGBT movement for a reason. We can and must advance equality at every level of our democracy until LGBT Montanans are treated the same as LGBT Washingtonians. Incremental and inadequate as a city registry may seem, it is an important step on the path to full equality, just as inclusive non-discrimination ordinances pave the way to statewide change.
- It shows the State of Montana that cities will do everything they can for LGBT people despite discriminatory laws. Municipal domestic partnership registries change state policies. We've seen this in 58 other cities across 23 states, many which lacked any relationship recognition prior to the establishment of local registries.
- Municipal domestic partnership registries help same-sex partners get health insurance coverage,

as well as better treatment from first responders and hospitals. Registration doesn't replace the need for statewide mandates or an advanced medical directive (To make sure you have all your bases covered, see: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/protecting-your-visitation-decision-making-rights>). The wallet card offers proof for employers that want to do the right thing despite bad state law, and something that emergency and hospital personnel can point to in your time of need.

NO ONE SHOULD SETTLE FOR MERE CITY-LEVEL DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP RECOGNITION.

I'm certainly not going to. That's why I hope you will join me in continuing to support local organizations working on non-discrimination ordinances across Montana, as well as the HRC, which won't rest until LGBT Americans are treated equally in all 50 states.

CAITLIN COPPLE
Missoula City Council Member

SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY MARYLAND



Having these local laws helps us demonstrate, especially to state legislators representing these areas that these laws operate without any of the “doomsday” scenarios our opponents testify will happen if these laws get passed.

Equality Maryland has been working to add gender identity and expression to the state anti-discrimination laws since the early 2000s.

As with many statewide LGBT legislative efforts, these laws often take many years to pass. Therefore, **the strategy for passing a statewide law usually involves pursuing incremental steps and wins.**

In the case for statewide transgender laws this may mean passing local laws.

These small steps serve two purposes—first, they help people right now and second, the issue becomes more palatable to state legislators and the public. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for trans people and their allies to advocate, share their stories and witness elected officials support their efforts.

Local legislative campaigns keep our skills sharp, our community engaged, and build momentum and support for the statewide law.

Part of our strategy in Maryland has involved passing local anti-discrimination laws for transgender people. We started in Baltimore City in 2002, followed by Montgomery County in 2007, Howard County in 2011 and Baltimore County in 2012. These jurisdictions comprise about 47% of the state’s population. Having these four local laws helps us demonstrate, especially to state legislators representing these areas, that other elected (local) officials are supportive and that these laws operate without any of the “doomsday” scenarios our opponents testify will happen if these laws gets passed.

CARRIE EVANS
Executive Director

SUCCESS STORY: ATLANTA, GEORGIA



I am proud to be mayor of the first deep Southern city to achieve a perfect score on the *Municipal Equality Index*.

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Atlanta's diversity is part of what makes our city great. Residents, businesses, film producers, artists, college students- a large part of what brings them to Atlanta is the quality of people who live and work here. This city has a rich history of upholding human rights and providing equal opportunity to all people. **Atlanta's commitment to equality includes outlawing discrimination based upon a person's sexual orientation and gender identity.**

LGBT equality has been an important issue for me throughout my career. As a member of Georgia's House of Representatives, I was the chief sponsor of Georgia's first and only Hate Crimes Bill that protected LGBT individuals. As a State Senator, I led the effort to oppose a constitutional amendment banning

gay marriage. I consistently helped defeat state bills that would ban gay adoption. On the national level, I was a vocal advocate for the repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell" and for allowing LGBT individuals to serve openly in the military.

My commitment to LGBT rights continues as Atlanta's Mayor.

In 2012, I expressed my support of marriage equality for same-sex couples; marriage is a fundamental right for all loving couples regardless of their sexual orientation. I recently appointed Robin Shahar as my Mayoral Advisor on LGBT issues. She will identify and provide counsel on areas of community concern, and will recommend strategies for advancing LGBT equality citywide. In July, I proudly signed a bill updating the Atlanta Code to ensure that all non-discrimination provisions include gender identity as a protected class. This September, I signed on as a co-chair of the national Mayors for the Freedom to Marry campaign.

Atlanta's history of civil rights leadership is rooted in the belief that our diversity makes our city stronger. As a result, Atlanta is home to one of the largest and most vibrant LGBT communities in the country. As Mayor, I will continue my efforts to achieve equal protection and equal treatment of Atlanta's LGBT residents, workers and visitors.

KASIM REED
Mayor

SUCCESS STORY: FAIRNESS KENTUCKY



Kentucky is a state of Fairness, and treating everyone with dignity and respect is just as much a rural value as an urban one.

From the hills of Appalachia to our commonwealth's capital and beyond, Kentuckians are mobilizing around LGBTQ Fairness like never before! And **who could have known it would be our rural coal country leading the way?**

Yet when the Appalachian town of Vicco, population 334, passed their Fairness ordinance this January—making it the smallest city in America to ban LGBTQ discrimination—it affirmed everything our Fairness Coalition has been hearing as we've worked across the commonwealth: Kentucky is a state of Fairness, and treating everyone with dignity and respect is just as much a rural value as an urban one.

83% of all registered Kentucky voters—Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike—support simple anti-discrimination protections in employment, housing, and public accommodations based on sexual orientation and gender identity, according to a recent poll. But just under 11% of our state legislators have signed on to support a statewide ban on discrimination, which is why we have endeavored

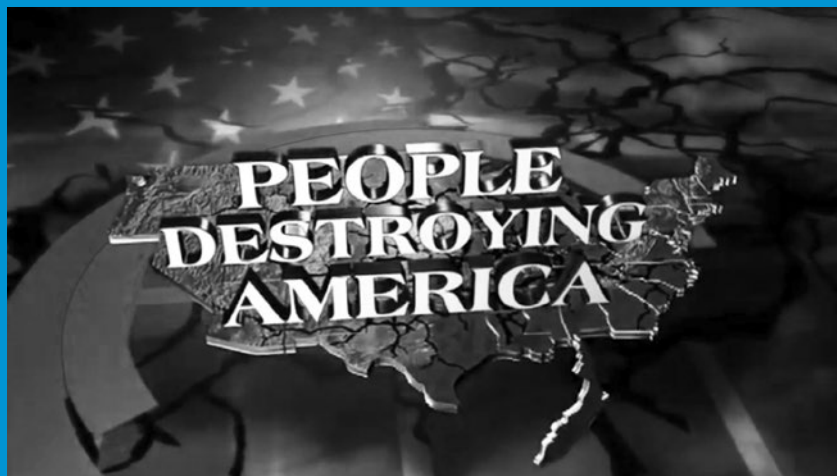
to build a groundswell of regional support through municipal Fairness campaigns.

Since Vicco's historic step—and its famed segment on *The Colbert Report*—thousands of local residents have become deeply involved in grassroots Fairness movements that span our entire commonwealth and work from a place of intersectional liberation, holding immigrants' rights, anti-racism, trans rights, women's rights, and others as central to our

work for LGBTQ equality. When our state's capital, Frankfort, became the fifth city in our commonwealth to outlaw LGBTQ discrimination this August, it became clear there's no turning back. Now two other Eastern Kentucky cities—Morehead and Berea—are making moves to become the next municipalities with Fairness, and it just keeps spreading!

CHRIS HARTMAN

Director



Vicco's Fairness Ordinance was featured on a segment of the *Colbert Report* entitled "People Who Are Destroying America—Johnny Cummings."

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SUCCESS STORY: SOUTH CAROLINA EQUALITY



The MEI has helped us build avenues of communication that remain open after the scoring process and allow us to work together to better address other LGBT related issues as they arise in the community.

The MEI has given us a tool in our conversations about municipal equality with South Carolina cities. It has provided an opportunity to sit down with City of Columbia and Charleston County leaders to discuss each scoring criteria, identify the steps that would need to be taken to secure a higher score in that area, and then determine which options were shorter term actions and which options were more longer term goals. Then we worked together to make them happen.

Because the MEI gives a deadline for which to complete our efforts, it gives our partners an incentive to complete the projects in time to ensure the highest score for their cities. **It is great to see hard work rewarded with higher scores.**

As these elected officials look to run for reelection, **some of the work that we have achieved together through the MEI has been a point of personal pride,** which they have shared publicly to let LGBT voters know that they are working for them to make their cities and counties better places for equality.

The MEI has helped us build avenues of communication that remain open after the scoring process and allow us to work together to better address other LGBT-related issues as they arise in the community. We hope more cities in South Carolina decide to take on the criteria of the MEI, even if they are not currently being scored.

RYAN WILSON
Executive Director

SUCCESS STORY: PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA



The Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce stands for equality in the workplace because it's good for business, and because equality is a value we honor and cherish.

The Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce in 2013 publicly came out in support of local legislation in Philadelphia

that incentivizes city businesses that voluntarily offer health care benefits to the life partners of their employees. The legislation, offered by City Councilman James Kenney, provides for a tax credit against local business taxes for those companies that elect to provide health coverage to their employees' partners. The law passed Council and was signed by Mayor Michael Nutter earlier this year—the first of its kind in the country.

The Chamber of Commerce testified in support of the legislation for two reasons.

First, we look favorably towards legislation that offers business a voluntary inducement to comply with the substantive matter at issue, in this case, providing health coverage—as opposed to involuntary mandates, which we oppose.

Secondly, the Chamber has a long, strong history of supporting diversity and inclusion in the Philadelphia workplace.

We have a Diversity and Inclusion Committee that regularly meets and promotes more diverse boards and executive positions in the Philadelphia workplace. We carefully survey our member companies on how they value diversity in their daily businesses, and, suggest best practices on how best to advance these values.

Studies show that businesses that adopt and practice policies promoting a more diverse

workplace are businesses that compete better, attract and retain higher quality workers, and thrive in the marketplace. The Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce stands for equality in the workplace because it's good for business, and because equality is a value we honor and cherish.

JOE GRACE

Director of Public Policy,
Greater Philadelphia Chamber of
Commerce

SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY OHIO



Somewhere in these processes, I “fell in love” with helping municipalities find their pathways to equality.

In 2005, I became the founding Executive Director of Equality Toledo. From our organizational inception, we worked with the University of Toledo to create a Domestic Partner benefits offering. This was followed by an effort to pass the first City Council-approved Domestic Partner Registry in Ohio. Somewhere in these processes, I “fell in love” with helping municipalities find their pathways to equality.

In 2008, I accepted a position with Equality Ohio and have continued to assist municipalities in passing inclusive, forward moving ordinances. **I have been able to act as a resource, offering advice, data and samples for local advocates.** Occasionally, I have the opportunity to be more involved as I was with the registry process in Dayton, Ohio.

For years, I have tracked municipal LGBT legislative work across Ohio.

Because of my experience assisting Ohio municipalities on their legislative journeys, I have been helping with the Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s Municipal Equality Index (MEI) for the last two years. Given the increasing level of exposure from the MEI, cities are working hard to improve their profiles.

It’s a growing trend, and LGBT-friendly cities are getting creative in how they compete to be more welcoming. This year I was able to consult with City of Toledo leaders to discuss the ways in which Toledo can be even more inclusive. I love being a part of growing equality and helping Ohio’s municipalities become the very best they can be.

KIM WELTER
Deputy Director

SUCCESS STORY: CINCINNATI, OHIO



We are now a leading voice in the fight for LGBT equality and for the first time in 60 years, our population is increasing.

Less than 10 years ago, Cincinnati lived under what has been called “the most anti-gay local law our country has ever seen.” While we lived under the law, Article XII, we lost close to \$50 million in Convention business, people moved away and our image as a world-class city suffered tremendously.

But in 2004, when 13 states banned gay marriage in their state’s constitution (including Ohio), Cincinnati voters repealed Article XII, making us the only successful gay rights initiative in the country that year. Since then, we’ve taken every necessary step to be an LGBT-inclusive city, leading to our score of 100 on this year’s Municipal Equality Index. Steps like extending equal partner health benefits to city employees, creating an LGBT police liaison and requiring all city contractors to agree in writing to an inclusive non-discrimination law.

One of those steps, extending transgender-inclusive benefits to city employees, catapulted us from the “back of the pack” to the “first city in the Mid-West.” We are now a leading voice in the fight for LGBT equality and for the first time in 60 years, our population is increasing. And our urban core is thriving with good paying jobs, exciting bars and restaurants, diverse housing and a top-notch park system great for families.

There’s a lot going on in Cincinnati. So please come check it out. I promise you will feel welcome, included and have a “world-class” time!

CHRIS SEELBACH
Councilman

SUCCESS STORY: TEMPE, ARIZONA



Tempe has a clear understanding that creating an inclusive workforce is imperative to serving a diverse community.

The City of Tempe takes great pride in being a welcoming and inviting community. Tempe is proud and elated to know that based on our Municipal Equality Index score of 100, it is ranked among the top cities in the nation for our inclusive policies and practices. Reaching this goal has required the investment of our City Council, residents and many other contributors along the way.

The City of Tempe started on this road in 1999, when employee groups advocated for being one of the first cities in Arizona to offer domestic partner benefits. Not only did Tempe City Management support implementing this benefit, it decided to go further and search for additional programs, benefits and policies that had equality in mind. This was done with a clear understanding that creating an inclusive workforce is imperative to serving a diverse community.

The Mayor and Council not only approved these policy decisions but actively sought to demonstrate an inclusive vision for Tempe. In

February 2014, the Mayor and Council unanimously approved an Anti-Discrimination Ordinance that secured broad civil rights protections for LGBT residents and visitors to Tempe. In other communities, this may have been an issue that drew opposition or controversy, but in Tempe, there was no opposition at the public hearing. The news headlines included not only information about this giant step forward in our community, but were also able to speak about the unanimous City Council vote and overwhelming community support.

In order to cement these broad civil rights protections into our community, the Council moved to amend our founding document by placing a Charter amendment on the city ballot for voter approval. The Charter amendment, which passed with more than 69 percent of the vote, prohibits discrimination or favor for city positions on the basis of race, color, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, familial status, age, disability, political affiliation and United States

military veteran status. This Anti-Discrimination Charter Amendment made the City of Tempe the first municipality to pass a Charter amendment of its kind in the State of Arizona.

Tempe's values and principles have never faulted over the years, and in fact have sustained this community through Arizona's challenges. The road has been long, and Tempe is very grateful for its alliances along the way. Our success is attributed to creating an inclusive partnership comprised of the Tempe workforce, management, City Council, Tempe's Gay/Straight Alliance, Tempe's business community (Downtown Tempe Community), the Tempe Convention and Visitor's Bureau, One Community, Equality Arizona, and finally, our progressive community.

MARK MITCHELL
Mayor

ANDREW CHING
City Manager

SUCCESS STORY: EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN



It's vitally important that local communities play a leading role in the fight for LGBT equality, especially in states like Michigan.

In March 1972, East Lansing became the first community in the United States to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation. Since that time we have worked hard to ensure that our city stands out as a model of LGBT-inclusion.

Being welcoming to all residents and visitors reflects the core values of our university community. It's part of who we are. We also recognize that creating and sustaining a genuine commitment to inclusion and diversity is essential to attracting and retaining an educated, talented workforce. To build a prosperous and vibrant city, we must be welcoming to all who wish to make our community their home and place of business. While equal opportunity and equal protection under the law are clearly moral imperatives and often thought of in those terms, we also recognize that they are economic imperatives for thriving 21st century communities.

It's vitally important that local communities play a leading role in the fight for LGBT equality, especially

in states like Michigan that lack basic relationship recognition and non-discrimination protections for LGBT people. While we fight our state's discriminatory constitutional ban on marriage equality in the courts, East Lansing adopted a domestic partner registry. While we work to amend the Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, East Lansing has not only adopted a comprehensive non-discrimination ordinance, but we have also adopted an Equal Benefits Ordinance so that taxpayer dollars are not spent supporting contractors who discriminate.

When we received our first MEI score of 86 in 2013, I set a goal of reaching a score of 100 before the next scores were released. I'm proud that we were able to reach that goal. More importantly, I am proud of what this score says about our community's commitment to inclusion and diversity.

NATHAN TRIPLETT
Mayor

SUCCESS STORY: WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS



These are small steps, but taken as a whole they tell a story: that Worcester is a place where all are welcome to live, work, and play.

Massachusetts is rightly known as a welcoming, inclusive place for all people to raise their families and live their lives. A decade ago, the Commonwealth became the first state in the union to allow same-sex couples to share in the freedom to marry. I'm proud to have been a leader in that fight.

But we cannot rest on our reputation. As a state senator, I co-sponsored a bill to add transgender people to the list of those protected from discrimination. Now, as the chief executive of the second-largest city in New England, I want Worcester to be a leader in human rights and equality. I am deeply proud of the city's perfect score this year, as it comes after months of hard work and community-wide support.

When I became Worcester's city manager in January 2014, the city's MEI score was an unacceptable 55. I made raising that score one of my administration's top priorities.

We immediately met with local PRIDE organizers, the city's Human Rights Commission and key city personnel to hear their concerns and create a step-by-step corrective plan.

Massachusetts has no state protection for public accommodations. So we passed a local protection, sending a clear message to the statehouse that those protections are needed and have local support.

As an employer, we banned discrimination in city employment. We now provide medical benefits for transgender individuals and ensure equal family leave. And we

affirmatively forbid discrimination in awarding city contracts to contractors.

We also sought to deepen the city's connection with the community. We added an LGBTQ liaison in both my office and the police department. This summer I marched with thousands of others in our annual PRIDE parade. Mayor Joseph Petty, who was the parade's grand marshal, also hosted a meet and greet with young LGBTQ leaders.

Our new score of 100 was possible through committed leadership and the strong support of the city council and the community. Some of these are small steps, but taken as a whole they tell a story: that Worcester is a place where all are welcome to live, work and play.

ED AUGUSTUS
City Manager

SUCCESS STORY:



Since the announcement, a wonderful community dialogue has ensued which allowed people to learn more about what it means to be transgender, as well as the challenges that so many of our friends and family members face every day.

On May 17th, 2014, Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren and City Council member Matt Haag announced that effective January 1st, 2015, the City would offer trans-inclusive health coverage to city employees.

This was an exciting announcement for the City, as Rochester has always been, and continues to be, at the forefront when it comes to the fight for civil rights. The City of Rochester was the first municipality in the State of New York to elect an openly gay person when Tim Maines was elected to City Council in 1985.

As such, this announcement furthers Rochester's commitment to fairness and equality for all of its citizens.

Since the announcement, a wonderful community dialogue has ensued which allowed people to learn more about what it means to be transgender, as well as the challenges that so many of our friends and family members face every day.

A growing number of cities and organizations across the country are realizing the benefits of adopting such policies and the positive effects that the policy change will have on the community. "This is not just a feel-good health measure, it is good business," said Councilman Haag.

Councilman Haag has continually pointed to how the City of Rochester, as well as companies across the

country making such changes, are recognizing the benefit to their organizations when employees and their families are well cared for.

Whether that benefit is corporate profit or public service, we are better served when our workers are well served. Rochester will continue to focus its policies around the common goal of ensuring our community is the most inclusive, and thus the best, community it can possibly be.

MATT HAAG
Councilman

SUCCESS STORY:



The benefit cost employees virtually nothing.

In July 2001, the City and County of San Francisco became one of the first municipal governments in the country to include transgender benefits in employees' health benefit plans, including gender reassignment surgery. Specifically, the benefit provides surgical coverage, hormone treatments, and appropriate mental health care.

At the time, the Mayor, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and the Health Service System (HSS) Board approved these new services, yet there was a prevailing concern that providing these benefits would increase health care premiums for employees and the City. There was also a concern that individuals seeking reassignment surgery would seek out City employment disproportionately increasing utilization.

To address these concerns, the City initially set a surgical claim cap and required a one year waiting period. The City was also proactive in addressing cost with service providers. For example, HSS identified clinics in the United States and Canada that were centers of excellence in gender reassignment surgery and entered into specific contracts for those discrete services.

Also, to create a reserve to pay for transgender benefits, HSS loaded an additional \$2 on employee premiums from 2001 to 2006 to build a bank of several million dollars. However, with low utilization of the benefit, and pre-negotiated contracts, the benefit cost employees virtually nothing. In total, from July 2001 through August 2005, HSS had collected \$5.6 million and paid out \$183,000 on 11 claims.

As a result of this beneficial cost data, the City's contracted HMOs no longer separately rate and price the transgender benefit, but instead treats the benefit the same as other medical procedures such as gall bladder removal or heart surgery. As a result, HSS was able to provide transgender benefits to employees at no additional cost. Having now experienced the fiscal impacts of the program, San Francisco has improved upon the program by eliminating the one-year waiting period as well as the surgical cap to make it easier for any City employee to access necessary transgender benefits.

**THE CITY AND COUNTY OF
SAN FRANCISCO**

SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY FLORIDA



Local organizing is where hearts and minds and laws change for the better and ordinary people find their voice to speak up and make a difference.

Equality Florida has always existed in a challenging political climate and we have learned important lessons about building grassroots leadership, developing bipartisan coalitions, enlisting the business community and holding elected leaders accountable.

Under our watch, Florida has led the southeastern United States in passing over 135 local policies outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, banning harassment of LGBT students, and providing domestic partnership benefits to our families. These victories have been secured in some of the most conservative strongholds of our state and have been a part of building momentum for statewide progress.

Through our continuous public education campaigns, we are winning the battle of public opinion with a strong majority of Floridians now supporting every one of our pro-equality issues including marriage equality.

The Municipal Equality Index has become a valuable tool in motivating city and county leaders to step up when it comes to LGBT equality. Not only does it provide a checklist of top policies that cities should have, it encourages a friendly but real rivalry to be the best between mayors and local legislators. In Florida, 3 cities jumped more than 10 points from last year to reach a 100 despite the MEI increasing the difficulty of reaching a perfect 100-point score.

Today the majority of Floridians live in parts of Florida that include vital protections but our state remains a patchwork where rights are dictated by invisible boundaries between cities

and counties. For Southern states and others who find a legislature that lags behind public support for LGBT equality, local work can be a transformation.

Our campaign to pass a statewide non-discrimination effort gains momentum and our local work has become our most powerful counter to opposition who make outrageous claims about the impact of such laws. It becomes difficult for a legislator to embrace extremists when he lives in a community that has had local protections on the books for nearly a decade.

Local organizing is where hearts and minds and laws change for the better and ordinary people find their voice to speak up and make a difference. The MEI is a tool worth leveraging to accelerate that change.

NADINE SMITH
Executive Director

SUCCESS STORY: FAIR WISCONSIN



From Kenosha to Eau Claire, Janesville to Appleton, and Manitowoc to La Pointe, local leaders have stood up for fairness and equality.

Local ordinances have been absolutely critical in our efforts to build a fair, safe, and inclusive Wisconsin. The day after the 2010 elections, Fair Wisconsin engaged in a grassroots effort to stop an anti-LGBT resolution in Green Bay. More than 100 activists flooded the city council chambers — the largest public turn out to a Green Bay council meeting ever. The anti-LGBT resolution was quickly tabled after our opposition saw the throng of LGBT and allied people packing the chambers.

We quickly realized that even in the absence of support for marriage equality and statewide trans* inclusive non-discrimination in the Capitol, local activists could engage in meaningful work to make their communities more inclusive — and demonstrate to legislative leadership in Madison that the Badger state is ready to move forward on LGBT equality.

Over the past four years, we have worked closely with local elected officials, city and county staff, and grassroots activists to pass inclusive employment benefits and trans* non-discrimination policies. In this short time, we have racked up victories in more than 15 communities. From Kenosha to Eau Claire, Janesville to Appleton, and Manitowoc to La Pointe, local leaders have stood up for fairness and equality.

Local work has provided an opportunity to build broad coalitions of support, including the business community, faith leaders, people of color, educational institutions, and labor unions. Through these ordinances we have demonstrated the depth and breadth of support for equality and delivered tangible results that improve the lives of LGBT Wisconsinites and their families.

As the freedom to marry reaches Wisconsin, local ordinance work is the foundation that will support ongoing efforts to modernize our state non-discrimination laws to include gender identity and expression, as well as ensure that legal equality will become a lived reality for LGBT Wisconsinites.

KATIE BELANGER
Executive Director

SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY PENNSYLVANIA



It's a simple equation and municipalities across Pennsylvania are proving that it works each and every day.

On March 20, 2014, Downingtown passed a local ordinance protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people from discrimination in their municipality. It was #34 as municipal ordinances go in Pennsylvania and it was one more victory in the battle for equality. Every ordinance Equality Pennsylvania helps to pass — from Bristol to Pittsburgh to Philadelphia — shows our lawmakers that Pennsylvanians are in favor of protecting all people from discrimination. Every ordinance we pass puts us one step closer to winning on a statewide level. Every ordinance and act of leadership from municipalities says to our lawmakers “C’mon and take the leap. Equality just makes sense, it’s the right thing to do, we’re prospering because of it and you should want this for the entire state.”

In this year’s MEI, more than half of Pennsylvania cities are in the top quartile. Places like Philadelphia has been an MEI all-star from the beginning, but this year Allentown

and Pittsburgh and New Hope are also sporting notable scores. But where is this reflected in the larger goal of passing statewide non-discrimination protections? The numbers tell the story. This year’s introduction of non-discrimination legislation has been historic, as over 100 legislators from the House and the Senate have signed on to sponsor this bill. In fact, a record-breaking number of sponsors, Democrats and Republicans alike.

Such movement is happening obviously because constituents and society are evolving on these issues, but also because large parts of the state are now covered by local non-discrimination laws and legislators see no negative backlash, a happier and safer populace and greater economic growth in covered locales. It’s a simple equation and municipalities across Pennsylvania are proving that it works each and every day.

TED MARTIN
Executive Director

SUCCESS STORY: PROMO



We believe that as these local wins mount, each advance puts us that much closer to a full statewide change.

The Municipal Equality Index (MEI) has become an incredible tool for advocates on the ground. The road map it provides to local officials is a sensible way for supporters to advance basic equality issues and, at the same time, provide education on the impact of these broader issues.

For example, this year Columbia, Missouri scored 70 points, which is comparable to last year's score despite the more challenging scorecard in 2014. This progress was an intentional effort by members of the local Human Rights Commission to meet the competitive, pro-equality 100% rating in Kansas City and Saint Louis. We know Columbia is a welcoming and supportive community, yet often our

allies don't see or comprehend how some existing laws impact the LGBT community. The MEI provides more insight into how they can directly take action and improve the lives of community members, as well as how existing laws and policies are already affecting the community.

In a state like Missouri, where there is no statewide law providing protections for employment, housing or public accommodations, the Municipal Equality Index has become a valued tool in our advocacy toolbox. We believe that as these local wins mount, each advance puts us that much closer to a full, statewide change.

A.J. BOCKELMAN
Executive Director

SUCCESS STORY: MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA



Florida's prohibition on marriage for same-sex couples impedes our ability to fulfill our core mission of providing for the health and welfare of our residents, thereby eroding the very legitimacy of our governments.

The City of Miami Beach is where diverse people from the United States and around the world come to live, work, and play. There are many reasons why people come here – but few are more important than the vibrancy and visibility of our LGBT community.

We have, for years, worked hard to make sure that we are leaders in the fight for equality. We prohibit discrimination against LGBT people and we have established a Human Rights Committee to enforce our law. We have enacted a domestic partner registry and we gladly provide employment benefits to domestic partners of our employees and to their children. We also require that our contractors provide these benefits to their employees.

In 2013, we became the only Florida government to reimburse our employees for the extra federal income tax charged on our LGBT families' domestic partner health insurance benefits.

Just this year, Miami Beach became one of the first cities in the United States to mandate that our health insurers cover gender affirming care for our transgender employees.

Today, Miami Beach is the leading government voice for marriage equality in Florida. We are the only party – public or private – to appear in every single Florida lawsuit challenging the state's right to continue to deny our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters the right to wed.

In these cases, we argue that Florida's prohibition on marriage for same-sex couples impedes our ability to fulfill our core mission of

providing for the health and welfare of our residents, thereby eroding the very legitimacy of our governments; interferes with the administration of our business as employers; and denies our taxpayers tourism revenue.

We do all of these things because it is the right thing to do. But equality is also good for us financially. We attract the best investment, a skilled and diverse workforce, and the most cosmopolitan visitors to our city.

The next year promises to be an exciting one for all of us: victory on the horizon and new challenges to meet. Onward!

PHILIP LEVINE
Mayor



SUCCESS STORY: SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS



Our experience has clearly demonstrated that the MEI can effectively serve as a tool for local advocates to enact and protect LGBT equality in cities and towns across the United States.

While best known for a tragic episode of persecution during the witch hysteria of 1692, Salem has worked hard to learn from our infamous history and now places tremendous value on the advancement of human rights and social justice.

These values, as well as Salem's growing LGBT community, led our No Place for Hate Committee – the City's official diversity committee – to approach my office in the spring of 2013 about our voluntary participation in HRC's Municipal Equality Index. With my support and the goal of achieving a 100% rating, the Committee conducted a preliminary self-assessment using

the MEI criteria to identify areas where the City could improve upon our LGBT-inclusivity.

As a result, the Police Chief and I designated official LGBT liaisons in both the Mayor's Office and Police Department to provide direct points of contact for LGBT residents and visitors. Additionally, my office's liaison worked with the Committee to draft a fully inclusive non-discrimination ordinance which was adopted unanimously by the Salem City Council. In doing so, Salem became only the fifth community in Massachusetts to extend protections against discrimination for the transgender community in public accommodations.

In July, we submitted our self-assessment and Salem officially achieved a 100% rating on the 2014 MEI, following Boston and Cambridge as the only Massachusetts communities to have ever achieved a perfect score. However, one area where Salem can still improve upon its LGBT-inclusivity, according to the MEI, is in providing transgender-inclusive healthcare benefits. We look forward to working with state officials to expand this coverage for Salem and over half-a-million other state and municipal employees in the year ahead.

Our experience has clearly demonstrated that the MEI can effectively serve as a tool for local advocates to enact and protect LGBT equality in cities and towns across the United States. I'm proud to say that with the help of the MEI and HRC, Salem is still making history today.

KIM DRISCOLL
Mayor



SUCCESS STORY: JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY

One Tuesday afternoon in September, a group of activists, citizens and elected officials gathered beneath a rainbow flag hung from Jersey City's city hall, and there we announced that we would cover transgender-related health care for municipal employees. We were the first large city in New Jersey to do this.

This is just the latest of our efforts to advanced LGBT rights.

Jersey City is one of the most diverse cities in the nation, and we pride ourselves on the efforts to celebrate the cultures and communities that make this true.

In 2013, we created the Mayor's LGBT Task Force to serve as a liaison group between our administration and the community. This group has worked tirelessly with city departments and agencies to institute diversity training programs and inclusive hiring practices, as well as partnering with the larger community on events that help local LBGT organizations further spread awareness on important issues.

Government has a responsibility to be a legitimizing force, to pull people in the direction of what is right, especially on LGBT issues. We are working hard to make sure that diversity and inclusion is celebrated in Jersey City, for every individual in every community.

STEVE FULOP
Mayor

Jersey City is one of **the most diverse cities in the nation**, and we pride ourselves on the efforts to celebrate the cultures and communities that make this true.



SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY OHIO

While always advocating for statewide nondiscrimination legislation to protect the LGBTQ community, Equality Ohio is continuing to work with municipalities throughout Ohio to increase local protections for LGBTQ people who face discrimination.

Three of Ohio's biggest cities (Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus) have robust LGBTQ protections, as do 11 other municipalities in a mix of urban, suburban and rural areas.

But even with 14 municipalities in Ohio having nondiscrimination protections in place, only about 18% of Ohioans are protected.

Equality Ohio's municipal projects aim to increase that percentage.

Our primary strategy to add city protections is data-driven—we assess which Ohio municipalities are most ready to receive our legal and policy analysis and outreach. Our secondary strategy is creative—we recently sent a letter to every mayor's office in Ohio (over 900 in all) explaining how we can help them enact nondiscrimination policy or law. Nine Ohio municipalities ranging in populations from 476 to tens of thousands responded favorably to our letter and are now considering the best way to put protections in place.

Sometimes, municipal projects are prompted by a high-profile case of discrimination and a motivated "champion" on a local city council. We recently found such a champion in Bexley, Ohio (a suburb of Columbus). In partnership with HRC, we were able to assist the city in the process of passing a strong nondiscrimination ordinance earlier this year.

And we work to make existing local laws better. Cleveland's existing nondiscrimination law has a large exemption which allows businesses to discriminate against transgender people. With strong support from HRC, we have built a large coalition of stakeholders from the community and spent more than a year educating about what it means to be transgender. The issue is on the city council's agenda and we are pushing for a vote to remove these harmful exemptions by the end of 2015.

Municipal work can be challenging, but we take pride in every single city that starts the conversation about why it is important to protect all Ohioans from discrimination.

ALANA JOCHUM
Managing Director



Municipal work can be challenging, but we take pride in **every single city** that starts the conversation about why it is important to protect all Ohioans from discrimination.

SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY ARIZONA

Arizona cities have led the way in enacting non-discrimination protections for their employees and residents. Five Arizona cities now have these protections—Phoenix, Tucson, Flagstaff, Tempe and Sedona—with still more considering municipal laws.

Equality Arizona has been a proud partner in advocating for these policies, knowing that every included municipal employee or resident is another person who need not fear being fired or refused service or housing based on who they are.

We have also been proud to partner with the City of Phoenix on effective and smooth implementation of their non-discrimination ordinance, serving to educate the public about what their rights are and what to do when things go wrong. We seek to share these lessons with other cities to ensure effective implementation and authentic protections in municipalities across the nation.

As a founding member of the Competitive Arizona Coalition, Equality Arizona is a part of the fight for statewide non-discrimination protections. Municipal work has been—and will continue to be—vital in our efforts to secure equal protections all across Arizona, as we build coalitions of support and educate folks across our state about today's reality: too many Arizonans can be fired or evicted because of who they are.

CATHERINE ALONZO
Co-Chair of the Board

NATE RHOTON
Co-Chair of the Board

Every included municipal employee or resident is another person who need not fear being fired or refused service or housing based on **who they are.**



SUCCESS STORY: LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

For nearly two decades, Louisville has been a leader of LGBT civil rights in the South. We were among the first cities to pass a trans-inclusive anti-discrimination Fairness Ordinance in 1999 and led on domestic partner benefits for city workers.

Now, with the continued leadership of Mayor Greg Fischer, Louisville has doubled its HRC Municipal Equality Index score in just two years to become one of the only southern cities with a perfect 100!

Fairness Campaign leaders have worked in intentional and meaningful ways with Louisville Metro Government to ensure our entire community is welcoming and inclusive. We've developed and implemented comprehensive

LGBT trainings, changed policy to be certain city contractors protect their LGBT workers, and launched initiatives to address our most vulnerable populations, including LGBT youth, elderly, and homeless.

Most recently, we rolled out the red carpet for LGBT couples by asking them to "Say I do in Lou"—a campaign of the Louisville Convention and Visitors Bureau to encourage LGBT folks to tie the knot in our "fair" city, earning us the distinction as one of Travel & Leisure's "Nine Perfect Places for Your LGBT Wedding Destination."

So come out, "Say I do in Lou," and share some #LouisvilleLove!

GREG FISCHER
Mayor

Fairness Campaign leaders have worked in intentional and meaningful ways with Louisville Metro Government to ensure our entire community is **welcoming and inclusive.**



SUCCESS STORY: INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

Indianapolis is one of the largest cities in the country, and it's a wonderful place to live.

We have more cultural attractions per person than most other cities; we have thriving arts and food scenes; we're home to major and minor league sports year round. And we have an entrepreneurial industry that's creating jobs and revitalizing neighborhoods across the city.

The entire state of Indiana was under a spotlight at the beginning of 2015 because of the proposed Religious Freedom Restoration Act. It was important for us in Indianapolis to make clear that we believe every single person has value, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Indianapolis has had a comprehensive law on the books for a decade that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

People are increasingly moving to where they want to live, and not necessarily because of where the jobs are. For any city to be competitive and attract top talent, they need to lead by showing they're open for business. Municipal governments can demonstrate that goal by putting into place policies that value diversity. That's what we've done in Indianapolis.

GREG BALLARD
Mayor

For any city to be competitive and attract top talent, they need to lead by showing they're **open for business.**



SUCCESS STORY: PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

For decades, Philadelphia has been on the frontlines of LGBT civil rights. Since the first LGBT rights bill was introduced in the 1980s, Philadelphia has grown into a city dedicated to inclusion and equality. Established by Mayor Michael Nutter in 2008, the Office of LGBT Affairs serves as a conduit and advocate for Philadelphia's LGBT communities within our government.

This past November, Philadelphians voted to amend our City Charter to make permanent the Office of LGBT Affairs, recognizing the contributions of LGBT Philadelphians to our city, and ensuring LGBT Philadelphians have a voice in our government for decades to come.

This year also saw the creation of the Gotta Go! Guide, an interactive, Google Maps-based guide to gender-neutral bathrooms across the city. The purpose of the Gotta Go! Guide is to help trans and gender non-conforming folk locate a bathroom they can use without fear or anxiety of gender policing or violence. In October, Philadelphia's City Council unanimously passed legislation requiring all single-stall bathrooms in Philadelphia to be gender-neutral. All people deserve to safely access a restroom when they need one.

The Office has also continued to work closely with the Philadelphia

Police Department to train police cadets in LGBT competency, and to coordinate with the police department's LGBT liaison on the implementation of Directive 152, an internal police directive on appropriate interactions between police and transgender people. There is always room for improvement, but we are proud of the work that can be accomplished when the lines of communication are open.

In other exciting news, LGBT-identified law enforcement officers across the greater Philadelphia region have come together to form the Greater Philadelphia Gay Officer Action League (GOAL), an LGBT law enforcement organization. This new chapter of the Philadelphia Police Department's history undoubtedly marks profound progress, and the Office of LGBT Affairs is proud to support the efforts of these officers as they support each other. Thanks to their brave and pioneering efforts, advocates are no longer fighting alone from the outside, and we will see further progress through these change agents within.

In my role as Director of the Office of LGBT Affairs, I am tasked with elevating the diversity, along with the unique needs, of the LGBT community. This year, the Office has striven to bring increased visibility to each of our LGBT communities.

The City of Philadelphia demonstrated its commitment to bisexual visibility by proclaiming September 23, 2015 to be Bisexual Visibility Day, in honor and celebration of our wonderfully diverse bisexual community.

This year also marked the first official trans pride flag raising ceremony, where the trans pride flag was proudly flown at Philadelphia City Hall for the first time in the City's history. The flag was raised by children attending Philadelphia's Trans Health Conference, and Philadelphia will proudly carry on this tradition for years to come.

In honor of LGBT History Month, the City also unveiled a newly designed rainbow pride flag embroidered with the seal of the City of Philadelphia and the Office of LGBT Affairs. The flag was raised for the first time during the 6th annual LGBT rainbow flag raising ceremony held on October 6, 2015.

It is my distinct honor to stand on the shoulders of the pioneering Philadelphians who came before me to help organize and energize this large scale response, and to continue to lead Philadelphia towards true equality for all. Let's get stuff done.

NELLIE FITZPATRICK
Office of LGBT Affairs Director



There is always room for improvement, but **we are proud of the work** that can be accomplished when the lines of communication are open.

SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY NORTH CAROLINA

In a challenging statewide climate for winning crucial non-discrimination protections, Equality NC and our local and national partners have turned to local municipal work to effect change for LGBT people in the Tar Heel state.

A local strategy helps win crucial protections in housing, employment, and public accommodations for our community as well as builds momentum for eventual statewide legislation from the ground up.

Just this year we worked with strong LGBT-ally elected officials in North Carolina's third largest city, Greensboro, to enact a first-of-its-kind fair housing ordinance that includes non-discrimination protections in both private and public housing. It passed council unanimously under the leadership of Mayor Nancy Vaughan. We also worked with the Wake County Board of Commissioners to update their employment protections to include gay and transgender employees.

Wake is the largest county in the state and the capital county. And our local advocates are just getting started—conversations are underway as well in Wilmington, Winston-Salem, and many other towns and cities across the state. Equality NC will launch its Municipal Ordinance Toolkit for local elected officials and local advocates this November, which will include sample ordinance language, proposed timelines, and backgrounds on other cities with these protections.

We are also excited to continue our work to win a historic ordinance victory in Charlotte, where Equality NC is working closely with HRC and MeckPAC (a local organization) to pass comprehensive non-discrimination protections in 2016.

CHRIS SGRO
Executive Director

Equality NC and our local and national partners have **turned to local municipal work** to effect change for LGBT people in the Tar Heel state.



SUCCESS STORY: SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Seattle has long been a welcoming place for everyone, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation. From the 1970s when we outlawed housing discrimination based on sexual orientation, to forming our first Gay and Lesbian Task Force in 1985, Seattle's been a national leader.

Prior to becoming Seattle's first gay Mayor, I served in the state legislature for 18 years—I can speak to the tremendous shift seen across the country recently. Yet, rarely does sweeping change happen overnight. It's important we celebrate local victories as we advance toward our ultimate goal of equity for all.

I'm deeply committed to achieving equity in Seattle. I've launched an initiative to address hate crimes against LGBTQ community members and made ending LGBTQ youth homelessness a priority.

I've signed legislation requiring all public places to designate single-stall bathrooms as all-gender. In 2016, our Office for Civil Rights will launch a media campaign highlighting diversity within Seattle's LGBTQ communities.

I'm proud of what we've accomplished so far and look forward to ensuring Seattle is where gender, identity, sexual orientation and race no longer determine one's ability to earn a living wage, to access quality housing, and to live a safe, healthy life.

ED MURRAY

Mayor



Rarely does sweeping change happen overnight. It's important we **celebrate local victories** as we advance toward our ultimate goal of equity for all.

SUCCESS STORY: MASSACHUSETTS TRANSGENDER POLITICAL COALITION

Working on trans rights in Massachusetts between 2014 and 2016 was much like watching a series of dominos fall, leading up to a massive win for equality in the Bay State.

As the coalition of LGBTQ organizations, including the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, were working to set the stage for statewide public accommodations legislation, we looked to the cities and towns of Massachusetts to test the waters. We had already passed local nondiscrimination ordinances in Boston, Cambridge, Northampton, and Amherst, but we strategized that by passing more inclusive policies on the local level, we would gain important momentum. Starting with Salem in March of 2014, the dominos began to fall, as local ordinances were proposed and passed across the commonwealth.

Over the course of two years, we went from four local ordinances to fourteen. These local efforts built the foundation for passing the statewide nondiscrimination legislation in 2016. We built trust with legislators, residents, and business owners, to show that these inclusive laws and policies were good for our communities.

Thanks to the MEI, we were able to illustrate that not only are nondiscrimination ordinances important for our cities and towns, but they are also just one step in a larger journey to becoming an inclusive community. Matters of health insurance, representation on city government, local LGBTQ resources, and so much more are all vital to LGBTQ inclusion and equality.

MASON DUNN
Executive Director

Working on trans rights in Massachusetts between 2014 and 2016 was much like **watching a series of dominos fall**, leading up to a massive win for equality in the Bay State.



SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY VIRGINIA

It has been wonderful to watch the success of the MEI over the past five years. It's reassuring to see communities across the nation focus on improving LGBTQ rights at the local level despite state and federal resistance.

Unfortunately, in Virginia this progress has been measured in a way that's like comparing apples to oranges. Virginia's Dillon Rule does not allow our local governments to extend protections to our LGBTQ community. Despite this barrier, our supporters across the commonwealth remain eager to have their cities implement fair policies for gay and transgender residents, and they have worked within the limitations of our laws to make their communities as inclusive as possible with support of statewide legislation, reporting hate crimes, and adding police liaisons.

A significant victory came within the last year by way of an opinion from Virginia's Attorney General Mark Herring. He found that school boards have the constitutional authority to implement nondiscrimination policies for their employees and students and that these policies can include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Since then, school boards representing over one-fourth of the state's students and teachers passed updated nondiscrimination policies. These school boards not only created safer classrooms for students but also competitive recruiting opportunities for teachers and spaces where they too felt valued. Equality Virginia was encouraged by these results which showed that, when allowed, our local communities are eager to enact policies creating a Virginia that is a safe, welcoming, and equal place for LGBTQ individuals and their families to live, work, and play.

There is much work to be done, but we are heartened by the progress made in a short period of time in communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

JAMES PARRISH
Executive Director

There is much work to be done, but we are **heartened by the progress** made in a short period of time in communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.



SUCCESS STORY: CLEVELAND OHIO

In 2009, Cleveland added “gender identity or expression” to protected classes in its nondiscrimination ordinance. Unfortunately, an exception was also included that allowed for business owners and employers to discriminate against transgender people with regard to restroom usage.

In 2014, community organizations and individuals in Cleveland formed the “Cleveland is Ready” Coalition and began efforts to change that.

“As an African American woman, I know the indignity of being treated as someone not as valuable as others. When I was sworn in as a councilwoman, I pledged to serve and uphold the dignity of all people,” said Cleveland City Council member Phyllis Cleveland. “The amended law, Ordinance 1446-13, brings the city code into alignment with nondiscrimination protections of more than 150 cities nationwide. I’d like to say the road to this achievement was smooth, but it wasn’t. Nevertheless, equality prevailed.

Before approaching this issue, leaders knew they needed to take steps to amplify knowledge of injustices faced by the transgender community and the details and implications of this proposed ordinance. The HRC Cleveland Steering Committee provided support and stability to the trans-led coalition to host educational events in wards across the city, faith forums, and events at the prestigious City Club of Cleveland.

A large component of the effort was one-to-one conversations with Clevelanders, as well as reaching out to local media with pitches and best practices for covering LGBTQ stories.

By the time ordinance 1446-13 had passed, over 60 local businesses had pledged their support to the transgender community.

Cleveland City Council President Kevin Kelley applauded the accomplishment saying, “Our city takes great pride in its efforts to be open and inclusive to all people, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender or gender expression. Cleveland City Hall over the years has been in the forefront of the struggles for social justice, human dignity and civil rights.”

THE CITY OF CLEVELAND



“I’d like to say the road to this achievement was smooth, but it wasn’t. Nevertheless, **equality prevailed.**”

PHYLLIS CLEVELAND
Cleveland City Council member

SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY OHIO

Working with local municipalities to improve LGBTQ equality is deeply rewarding work. It's not merely because it creates earned media, which elevates stories about LGBTQ people and fuels our momentum. It's not just because it increases the number of cities across Ohio that provide legal remedies and protections for LGBTQ people. Municipal work is deeply rewarding because it is an investment in community.

Coordinating with local partners and boots-on-the-ground activists is a practice in developing leadership and giving people the tools they can use to effect change. In each community Equality Ohio has worked in, we now have a strong network of leaders that are ready to mobilize for LGBTQ equality.

LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination protections aren't the only issue that cities can address. Recently, Cincinnati became the first city (outside of Washington D.C.) to ban conversion therapy. This was only possible because of a strong network of leaders with the expertise and passion to get the job done.

Our biggest accomplishment this year happened in Cleveland. With the support of HRC and local partners, we took the restroom issue on directly—and won. When Cleveland first passed LGBTQ nondiscrimination protections including gender identity/expression in 2009, they put in a bad exception allowing for transgender people to be told by employers and business owners what restroom they could or could not use.

After nearly three years of work and coalition-building, Cleveland City Council passed an ordinance to remove that exception in a unanimous vote—just days before the Republican National Convention. The contrast of the GOP's anti-LGBTQ platform and the inclusiveness of the city holding the convention was a powerful story that is inspiring other cities across the country to do the right thing.

Equality Ohio is committed to a data-driven municipal strategy side-by-side with our work at the state level for laws that truly reflect the needs of LGBTQ Ohioans.

ALANA JOCHUM
Executive Director

Municipal work is deeply rewarding because it is an **investment in community.**



SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina has been at the epicenter of the debate on LGBTQ non-discrimination protections since March when extreme state legislative leaders and Governor Pat McCrory declared war on municipal non-discrimination protections. After an 18-month fight to win a non-discrimination ordinance inclusive of public accommodations for Charlotte—the largest city in North Carolina and the 17th largest in the nation—our legislature decided to use that ordinance as a statewide wedge issue. That wedge issue is commonly known as HB2.

In doing so, they not only overturned the Charlotte ordinance but also forced all communities to discriminate against transgender people, attacked local authority over minimum wage protections, prohibited law suits based on race or age discrimination in employment, and overturned many other local anti-discrimination measures. In short, they enacted the most radical anti-LGBTQ law in the nation. It has been a difficult year for LGBTQ North Carolinians, especially our transgender brothers and sisters.

But Equality NC, the Human Rights Campaign, and other local and national partners like the National Center for Transgender Equality banded together to fight the law. More than 200 major businesses have demanded repeal. A massive campaign was waged to repeal the law in the legislative short session. Cities and towns across the state have passed resolutions calling for the repeal of HB2. The majority of North Carolinians are standing against discrimination and for the repeal of HB2. We have won a statewide hearts-and-minds campaign for LGBTQ protections, and many cities will no doubt pass their own protections once the law is repealed. Additionally, statewide, fully inclusive protections are now a very real possibility in the near future for this Southern state.

CHRIS SGRO
Executive Director

The majority of North Carolinians are **standing against discrimination** and for the repeal of HB2.



SUCCESS STORY: JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

In the 2016 Mississippi legislative session, we saw one of the worst pieces of discriminatory legislation in the country pass both houses and swiftly signed by the governor.

HB 1523, dubbed the “Religious Liberty Accommodations Act,” would have allowed individuals, religious organizations and private associations to use religion to discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Mississippians in some of the most important aspects of their lives, including at work, at school, in their family life and more.

While this law is currently in the courts, the Jackson City Council had to make it clear that everyone is welcome and should feel safe in our capitol city, the largest city in our state. That is why on June 14, the Jackson City Council unanimously passed a city-wide non-discrimination ordinance which protects LGBTQ citizens from discrimination in housing, public accommodations and employment.

In the midst of the fight over HB 1523, the superintendent and members of the Jackson Public School Board of Trustees voted to extend fully-inclusive sexual orientation and gender identity protections to their employees and students.

All of these efforts to promote diversity and inclusion came about through strong leadership in conjunction with help from our friends at the Human Rights Campaign.

Jackson is a diverse and vibrant city that is open for business, and our city leaders are committed to working on behalf of all our citizens.

TYRONE HENDRIX
City Council President



The Jackson City Council had to make it clear that **everyone is welcome** and should feel safe in our capitol city.

SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY OHIO

One of the most important lessons we've learned is that when you are trying to implement protections for LGBTQ people, the process is just as important as the product. You can't rush. People are invested in their home, and if you're going to change things — even for the better — you have to hear about their vision of their community.

That means educating people on why people value living in cities that affirm LGBTQ people and bringing into the process the people who should know about the change, like small business owners.

Sometimes they can be hesitant.

Is this more regulation? Is this a problem here? How much will this cost?

So we dutifully join local city council meetings week after week, sharing our stories of **how truly important LGBTQ protections are.**

It's tempting to skip those hard conversations in order to push through policy, check a box, and remind our legislators that cities are doing what they won't. But these sometimes difficult conversations must be had, so we dutifully join local city council meetings week after week, sharing our stories of how truly important LGBTQ protections are.

A second lesson that I reflect on is that the work has real people behind it.

This mother of a transgender child is not just media-trained and coached for testimony; this is a woman who chose to raise a child in this city and wants the city to value them as much as any other child.

The man who just came out to his workplace is someone whose career is on the line if these protections do not exist.

A victory matters to people's lives.

Celebrating the people that municipal work helps is contagious — we're doing it right when the city council bursts out into applause after a vote and I get emails asking how someone can make change in their city.

In a way, both lessons are about people realizing their power and taking action to make our world better.

Not a bad reason to get up in the morning.

GWEN STEMBRIDGE
Northeast Ohio Coordinator
Equality Ohio



SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania is making great strides in becoming a more equal state. This is happening one municipality at a time. Obstructionist ultraconservatives in the Pennsylvania legislature have held up fourteen years of efforts to pass a statewide nondiscrimination ban.

This hold was solidified with the 2016 General Election, in which numerous stalwart supporters were ousted from their Pennsylvania House and Senate seats. We are fortunate to have many local municipalities that see the value in protecting LGBTQ citizens from discrimination and harm.

This year, Pittsburgh and Allentown will receive a 100-point score for the first time. They join Philadelphia, a 100-point city in the MEI since the inaugural report in 2012. Pittsburgh was the first city to pass an ordinance protecting youth from conversion “therapy” in the state, followed by Philadelphia and Allentown. Ambler Borough, Dickson City, Wilkes-Barre City, Carlisle, Kennett Square, Phoenixville, Royersford, Camp Hill, Stroudsburg, and Upper Dublin Township each passed nondiscrimination ordinances, taking the state total to 44.

Equality Pennsylvania looks forward to another year of helping even more municipalities achieve full inclusivity for all.

JOHN DAWE, CNP, CFRE
Managing Director
Equality Pennsylvania



Pittsburgh was the first city **to pass an ordinance protecting youth from conversion “therapy”** in the state, followed by Philadelphia and Allentown.

SUCCESS STORY: HRC MISSISSIPPI

In Mississippi, some of the greatest strides for equality have taken place in cities and towns across our state.

In June of 2016, the capital city of Jackson became the first Mississippi city to pass a comprehensive LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination ordinance. This came about through collaboration with courageous Jackson city leaders and our team at HRC.

On March 7, 2017, Magnolia became the second city in the state to pass a fully comprehensive nondiscrimination ordinance. Again, this achievement came through bold city leadership and with the help of HRC.

These ordinances not only sent a strong message of inclusion, they are tangible acts which enable all citizens to feel safe and welcome in their hometowns.

This summer, our team had the opportunity to be present at the Mississippi Municipal League's summer convention. With municipal leaders present from across Mississippi, we shared the many ways cities can improve their communities. From passing nondiscrimination ordinances to making policies that protect city employees LGBTQ-inclusive, these conversations will help bring about progress.

Most of all, what we learned at the Municipal League Convention and through our travel around the state is that municipalities want to spur development and make it known that their communities are open to all, especially LGBTQ residents and visitors. We are proud to work alongside leaders in cities and towns across Mississippi who understand this principle and are committed to ensuring the fundamental equality of all who work, live and go to school in their communities.

We look forward to continuing to build crucial partnership in cities all across our state in order to achieve full equality for all Mississippians.

ROB HILL
State Director
HRC Mississippi



These ordinances not only sent a strong message of inclusion, they are tangible acts which enable all citizens **to feel safe and welcome** in their hometowns.

SUCCESS STORY: PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

When Mayor Peduto took office in 2014, he brought a mandate with him that forever changes the culture of our city government. His vision to make Pittsburgh safe and welcoming for all residents—regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression—guides our endeavors.

Since the 2016 Presidential Election, Pittsburghers have steadfastly supported the Mayor's vision. Shortly after President Trump made his victory speech, residents called upon city government, urging the Mayor and Council to act quickly to protect our LGBTQ youth. Many expressed concerns that the Federal government could endorse conversion therapy.

I mobilized with staff from the Mayor's Office and Council, to craft and distribute a clear message: If your intent and action do not protect our youth, do not enable them to grow and prosper into young adults, it is not for us. We are fortunate to live in a progressive city where the people, their Councilmembers, and their Mayor place people above all.

I worked closely with two Councilmembers to craft and pass Pittsburgh's bill protecting youth from conversion therapy. Councilman Bruce Kraus, the City's first openly gay elected official, was a co-sponsor on the bill that was introduced by Councilman Dan Gilman.

All nine City Councilmembers unanimously voted in support of the bill, making it clear that regardless of the values held by the federal legislature and executive branch, in Pittsburgh we will continue to protect the rights of our residents.

When our city government enacted this bill, I knew that Pittsburgh will be a catalyst for our Commonwealth and our Nation.

COREY BUCKNER
Manager

Office of Community Affairs

Coordinator

Mayor's LGBTQIA+ Advisory Council



Regardless of the values held by the federal legislature and executive branch, in Pittsburgh we will **continue to protect the rights of our residents.**

SUCCESS STORY: BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Birmingham's place in history will forever be tied to the struggle for human rights. Now, more than fifty years after the Voting Rights Act was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, basic civil rights—which every single person on the planet deserves—are still under attack.

We see it nationally and we see it on a state level with places like North Carolina passing a bill that forces people to use bathrooms that are inconsistent with their gender identity. That bill ultimately led to the ouster of the then incumbent Republican governor because citizens stood up and said "No." Our actions matter.

Why lawmakers continue to focus on an individual's sexuality or how a single person identifies is beyond me. What I do know is this: in order to keep moving forward, bold steps need to be taken to ensure every single person has equal protection under the law. Anything short of that is an affront to what this country claims to stand for.

The passage of the nondiscrimination ordinance in Birmingham was one such step. But the fight is not over. Now, all Birmingham citizens, regardless of race, nationality, sex, disability, familial status, sexual orientation or gender identity, have a legal path toward relief from discrimination. The ordinance makes it unlawful to discriminate against others, whereas before our LGBTQ family had no legal recourse to fight back against intolerant and unfair treatment. The newly created 11-member human rights commission will be instrumental in identifying entities that choose to traffic in bigotry and help hold them accountable for their actions.

I could not be more proud to have worked with an amazing assortment of advocates and groups like the Human Rights Campaign who continue to fight for equality, even if the road seems bleak at times. These victories are what give us hope and carry us through these uncertain times of renewed bigotry and bluster.

JOHNATHAN F. AUSTIN
President
Birmingham City Council

In order to keep moving forward, **bold steps need to be taken** to ensure every single person has equal protection under the law.



SUCCESS STORY: DENVER, COLORADO

In December 2016, on a unanimous vote by City Council, the City and County of Denver amended its building code to require that all new and existing single-stall restrooms provide signs designating them as gender neutral.

“This code change was a commonsensical action that we know will allow people to live their lives without anxiety about something as simple as bathroom access,” Mayor Michael B. Hancock said. “This is also another way in which Denver demonstrates that we are a welcoming and inclusive place to call home for all our people.”

The amendment to the building code provides more options for those who are transgender, caregivers of the elderly and disabled, parents of small children, and customers who should not have to wait in line when there is an empty single-stall restroom available. The amendment does not affect multi-stall bathrooms. Since 2008, transgender individuals have had the right to use the restroom consistent with their gender identity in the State of Colorado.

“This code change was a commonsensical action that we know will **allow people to live their lives without anxiety** about something as simple as bathroom access.”

MICHAEL B. HANCOCK
Mayor of Denver

The change was among a series of pro-LGBTQ recommendations identified by Denver’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Queer (LGBTQ) Commission – a group of 21 volunteers appointed by the Mayor to advise him and his team on legislation, policies, programs, and practices that impact the LGBTQ community – and adopted by the Mayor in 2015.

Building on the citywide partnership established through that effort, which included the Mayor’s Office, the LGBTQ Commission, members of City Council and Community Planning and Development, the Mayor next worked with leaders in the Denver Police Department to assign a department liaison to the LGBTQ community in June 2017.

In his first official month in this capacity, Lt. Michael Wyatt unveiled the Safe Place program, a partnership with local businesses modeled after a successful Seattle initiative. The program encourages the reporting of bias motivated crimes and aims to create awareness around and reduce anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment, and to provide a safe space for victims of crime while they await police.

“There were incidents occurring in Denver where members of the LGBTQ community were being harassed, intimidated and downright assaulted, and many of those not coming to police department attention, and that is wrong,” Lt. Wyatt said.

THE CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER



SUCCESS STORY: COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

The City of Columbia, Missouri, is committed to building an inclusive community where all people have the opportunity to thrive. While the State of Missouri still does not prohibit discrimination based upon sexual orientation or gender identity, the City of Columbia has been a leader in the state by passing legislation to add sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes.

The City's Human Rights Commission partners with community organizations to sponsor events such as Pride Fest and an annual Fair Housing and Lending Seminar. Additionally, discrimination complaints are investigated by the Commission.

Consistent with our Strategic Plan, the City works to ensure that all people can feel safe where they live, work, learn and play. While there has been a national debate over inclusive bathrooms, the City amended its building and plumbing codes to allow for more inclusive restrooms in 2012. To promote inclusion, the City offers free inclusive bathroom signage to local businesses and schools. The City is working toward creating inclusive bathrooms in all of its public buildings and parks.

We are committed to building an inclusive community where all people have **the opportunity to thrive.**

In addition to making public spaces more inclusive, City departments strive to ensure high quality services are provided to all. The Columbia Police Department and City Manager's Office have LGBTQ liaisons who work with businesses, organizations, higher education institutions and community members to improve LGBTQ residents' access to services.

The City's health department operates a domestic partnership registry, provides regular HIV and STD prevention education, provides information on coming out to local LGBTQ youth, partners with LGBTQ groups, and provides inclusive training to City staff and City Council members.

Thanks to the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index review last year, we realized that we did not offer transgender-inclusive health benefits, so in December 2016, the City began offering transgender-inclusive health benefits to City employees.

We are proud of our diverse community, which is enhanced by the presence of three higher education institutions: University of Missouri, Stephens College and Columbia College. We are excited at our progress towards achieving our vision that Columbia is the best place for everyone to live, work, learn and play.

BRIAN TREECE
Mayor



SUCCESS STORY: MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

In June 2008, Mayor Tom Barrett underscored the necessity to re-energize the City of Milwaukee Equal Rights Commission (ERC). Since then, the ERC has remained steadfast in the charge to ensure that all people in Milwaukee are equally protected against discrimination.



Recognizing increasing disparities in state and federal protections, the ERC worked tirelessly to rewrite its governing ordinance to extend employment, housing, and public accommodation safeguards that include gender identity, gender expression, domestic partners, HIV status, and more. In collaboration with community stakeholders, the rewrite of the city's Equal Rights Ordinance, Chapter 109, expanded the protected classes and provided remedies for victims of discrimination in the City. It unanimously passed the full Common Council in October 2017—readying the ERC to act against those who abuse the rights of others and serve as a link between the public and city government.

Through the passion, partnership, and expertise of local organizations such as the Milwaukee LGBT Center, and the acumen and drive of Alderman Cavalier Johnson, the Common Council, and the

Mayor, Milwaukee became the first Wisconsin municipality to protect minors from so-called “conversion therapy”—leading the way for other municipalities and, with hope, the State of Wisconsin to also protect youth from this harmful and discredited practice.

As an equality and equity policy influencer and defender of equal rights, the ERC will work closely with the Mayor's Office, Common Council and city departments to invest in all-gender single-stall bathrooms in all city buildings and additional resources for LGBTQ+ city employees and future recruiting. The ERC is committed to working collaboratively with community groups and individuals to advance fairness, dignity, and respect for all who live, work, and play in the City of Milwaukee.

**THE CITY OF MILWAUKEE
EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSION**



The ERC is committed to working collaboratively with community groups and individuals **to advance fairness, dignity, and respect** for all who live, work, and play in the City of Milwaukee.

SUCCESS STORY: BROOKINGS, SOUTH DAKOTA

It's not often being in first place is a disappointment. However, when Brookings first appeared on the MEI scorecard in 2013, we truly were disappointed. We had the highest score of any city in South Dakota, but that was an embarrassingly low score of 34. The Brookings Human Rights Committee felt strongly that this score did not reflect the values of our community, nor did it send the right message to those considering Brookings as a place to live, work, and play. So, we set out to improve both our score and our message.



Over the next four years, we made steady improvements. The city took the lead in the state being first to create LGBTQ law enforcement liaisons, city administration liaisons, and to offer transgender healthcare benefits to its employees. Our score increased each year, reaching a high of 72 in 2017. Along the way, the Human Rights Committee became the Human Rights Commission. In February 2017, the Commission presented a Resolution of Inclusivity to the City Council for consideration. The resolution passed unanimously, with specific direction from the Council that the words of the resolution were not enough and that Brookings must act to give the words meaning. "I was so proud when resolution 17-022 passed," Brookings Mayor Keith Corbett said. "However, I thought, why stop there? Brookings can do more. We need to challenge ourselves to find what more the community can do to ensure everyone is treated with dignity and respect, and embrace the mosaic of diverse residents and visitors in Brookings."

Empowered by this direction, the Commission worked with the City Attorney to draft what would be the first comprehensive LGBTQ-inclusive non-discrimination ordinance in the state. The Commission presented the ordinance to the Council for consideration in September 2017. The Council passed this landmark legislation on a unanimous vote. This brave action by the Council catapulted Brookings to the first perfect 100 MEI score in South Dakota and sent a message to the world that Brookings is truly a place where you can bring your dreams.

KEITH W. CORBETT
MAYOR

"I thought...We need to challenge ourselves to find what more the community can do to ensure everyone is treated with dignity and respect."

SUCCESS STORY: FAIR WISCONSIN

In 1982, Wisconsin became the first state in the country to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation. In 2018, Wisconsin is the last remaining state that has not expanded its sexual orientation-inclusive non-discrimination law to include gender identity.

At the state level, bipartisan support for expanding our non-discrimination law is very slowly and incrementally growing—but in the meantime, leaders in local communities are taking matters into their own hands.



Michelle Stocker/*The Cap Times*

Fair Wisconsin is proud to help advance equality in those communities with policy and organizing support. Over the years, we have worked with local governments to pass municipal non-discrimination ordinances in the cities of Madison, Milwaukee, Appleton, Janesville, Cudahy, Sun Prairie, De Pere, and Verona, along with Milwaukee County, and Dane County.

While we continue to work at both the state and local level to pass inclusive non-discrimination laws, more municipalities are also working to protect youth from conversion therapy.

Our last state legislative session included a bill to prevent state-licensed health care professionals from engaging in conversion therapy with minors. The bill did not advance out of committee before the session ended, but the momentum it created for this important issue inspired leaders in Milwaukee to pass a local ordinance curtailing the harmful practice, making the City of Milwaukee the first municipality in the state to do so.

The City of Madison was not far behind in enacting similar protections. All across Wisconsin, we continue to see the push for equality at the local level.

We know that local leaders consider the MEI an important tool for objectively measuring their communities' commitment to fostering LGBTQ equality. The City of Milwaukee improved their score to 100 for the first time this year, and Racine has made some improvements in their score as well.

As we push for state government to recognize the need for protections for everyone in the LGBTQ community, our local government officials are leading the way for equality. Fair Wisconsin in partnership with HRC Wisconsin and our allies will continue to work side by side with local leaders to make the Badger State a safer and more welcoming place for all.

**MEGIN MCDONELL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
FAIR WISCONSIN**



All across Wisconsin, we continue to see **the push for equality at the local level.**

2018 SPOTLIGHT: FAIRNESS WEST VIRGINIA

West Virginia might be considered by some to be the heart of Trump Country, but the Mountain State continues to make strides for equality one municipality at a time.



In fact, 2016 saw more LGBTQ-inclusive non-discrimination ordinances passed in West Virginia than in any other state in the country. We followed up on that success with the passage of an ordinance in Morgantown, home to the state's flagship university. This means that the three largest cities in West Virginia protect their LGBTQ residents and workers from discrimination.

But we are also focusing on our small towns, which are important to sending the message to our state legislature that all West Virginians believe in fairness. In 2015, Thurmond (population 5) became the smallest town in the United States with a fully-inclusive comprehensive non-discrimination ordinance. No openly LGBTQ people currently live in Thurmond, but should one move there they will be protected in employment, housing, and public spaces!

Huntington, our second-largest city, has not rested on their laurels since passing their non-discrimination ordinance in 2013. For the second year in a row, the city is the highest-scoring municipality in the state. Mayor Steve Williams has continued to make inclusiveness a top priority in town with numerous policies undertaken to make Huntington open to all.

While this success is great, just 175,000 people currently are protected under local non-discrimination law in a state of 1.8 million. We are hopeful that the state legislature will move forward soon on adding sexual orientation and gender identity to the state's civil rights laws.

In the meantime our municipalities, both large and small, continue to lead the way.

ANDREW SCHNEIDER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
FAIRNESS WEST VIRGINIA



We are also focusing on our small towns, which are important to sending the message to our state legislature that **all West Virginians believe in fairness.**

SUCCESS STORY: RENO, NEVADA

The mission of the City of Reno is creating a community that people are proud to call home. My hometown has truly undergone a RENOvation, and we continue to move in an upward direction. Staff were challenged this year to increase equity and equality in our organization, municipal code, and city policies to make services more inclusive of LGBTQ employees, citizens, and visitors.



We wanted to ensure we were treating LGBTQ employees equally. To make the City of Reno a more inclusive workplace, LGBTQ-inclusive diversity training is required to be shared, reviewed, and tested for understanding by all of our employees. Additionally, healthcare benefits for every employee and their covered dependents is transgender-inclusive, including hormone therapy and mental health counseling.

Our next focus was encouraging our community to engage LGBTQ neighbors in a thoughtful and respectful way. LGBTQ liaisons were identified through the City Manager's Office (Mandee Bowler, Human Resources Director) and Reno Police Department (Commander Oliver Miller). These awesome employees volunteered to look at city policies and services through an LGBTQ lens, be available to constituents who want to bring LGBTQ-related issues to our organization, and encourage feedback from our LGBTQ community members in a positive way.

The Reno City Council will move forward and continue to protect and promote the personal dignity of all Reno residents, businesses, and visitors by eliminating discriminatory barriers in the community which may prevent individuals from reaching their full human potential. We look forward to making additional strides regarding social justice, diversity and inclusion, equal opportunity, and human dignity among all residents of the City of Reno.

**HILLARY L. SCHIEVE
MAYOR**



We look forward to making additional strides regarding **social justice, diversity and inclusion, equal opportunity, and human dignity** among all residents of the City of Reno.

SUCCESS STORY: MORGANTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA

The City of Morgantown has deliberately worked to build an inclusive city for the past decade.

The City realized that the West Virginia Legislature would not pass inclusive civil rights protections in the near future and decided, in 2014, to look for alternative local protections for its LGBTQ citizens. With the help of the Human Rights Campaign staff, the Morgantown Human Rights Commission and the City Attorney worked on several drafts of comprehensive amendments to the City's Human Rights Ordinance (HRO).



In the meantime, with the support of Fairness West Virginia, several West Virginia cities successfully passed inclusive non-discrimination protections. In May 2017, the Morgantown City Council adopted official city welcome statements, which included specific mention of sexual orientation and gender identity.

On October 17, 2017, with the enthusiastic support of the LGBTQ community, leaders and members of several organizations, and the public, the Morgantown City Council voted unanimously to adopt the amendments expanding the City's HRO to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Soon after, the City Attorney, in coordination with the Morgantown Human Rights Commission, drafted a protocol for processing complaints that are not currently adjudicated by the West Virginia Human Rights Commission.

Now, Morgantown's commitment to diversity is backed by vital protections for all residents and visitors.

The Municipal Equality Index (MEI) program of the Human Rights Campaign helped engage local communities in partnerships for expanding non-discrimination beyond limitations in federal and state law. Morgantown has become a committed active partner in such change. The MEI has helped the City generate awareness of issues facing the LGBTQ community and identify opportunities for mitigation. It has also contributed to generating momentum for specific actions to further inclusivity in Morgantown. Thanks to our participation in the MEI program, the work to expand understanding and support for equality in Morgantown continues.

We appreciate the enabling work of the Human Rights Campaign in our community and in peer state communities as well.

**BILL KAWECKI
MAYOR**

The MEI has helped the City generate awareness of issues facing the LGBTQ community and identify opportunities for mitigation.



SUCCESS STORY: ALABAMA

Municipal equality for LGBTQ Alabamians is the product of years' long coalition partnerships between local grassroots organizers, the Human Rights Campaign and statewide LGBTQ advocacy organization, Equality Alabama.



JAMIE FOSTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
EQUALITY ALABAMA



EVA KENDRICK
ALABAMA STATE DIRECTOR
HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

When the city of Birmingham, Alabama became the first in the state to pass a non-discrimination ordinance (NDO) inclusive of LGBTQ persons on September 26, 2017, it was the culmination of more than ten years of work from LGBTQ grassroots organizers and a pro-equality coalition including Equality Alabama and HRC. This year Birmingham also elected pro-equality Mayor Randall Woodfin, who appointed Josh Coleman as the state's first LGBTQ liaison in a city executive's office.

In April 2018, the city of Montevallo joined Birmingham in enacting a citywide non-discrimination ordinance providing protections that include sexual orientation and gender identity in housing, public accommodations and employment after a nearly two-years' long campaign led by local advocates of the Montevallo Acceptance Project.

As the Montevallo and Birmingham NDO victories proved, doing the right thing doesn't only take courage; it also requires action and intersectional, relational coalition partnerships.

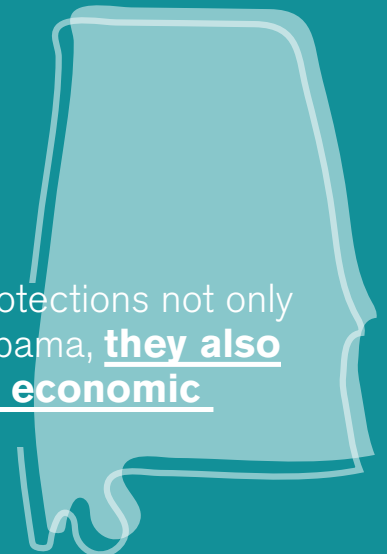
In our work to enhance municipal protections across Alabama, this commitment to community-led, directed advocacy efforts has produced a model of success we hope other organizers in deep red states will find helpful.

Our work has not stopped with Birmingham and Montevallo—these victories are only the beginning.

Alabama is currently one of 30 states without comprehensive LGBTQ-inclusive non-discrimination protections at the state level. This lack of statewide protections makes municipal action imperative in creating an Alabama that is fair and welcoming, and a place where families can live, work, learn, and play equally.

These municipal protections not only create a better Alabama, they also foster continued economic advancement, sending a message that these cities are open for business. When asked by reporters at the 2017 MEI release if Birmingham's non-discrimination ordinance and its high MEI score would improve the city's chances of recruiting major businesses, Mayor Woodfin replied, "Absolutely it does."

These municipal protections not only create a better Alabama, **they also foster continued economic advancement.**



SUCCESS STORY: NORMAN, OKLAHOMA

The City of Norman is proud of its official motto: “Building an Inclusive Community.” The Norman City Council joined the National League of Cities’ Partnership for Working toward Inclusive Communities in 2008 and has since worked with the City’s Human Rights Commission to continue finding meaningful ways to make Norman a more inclusive community.



Over the past decade, under the leadership of Mayors Cindy Rosenthal and Lynne Miller, Norman has taken an active and progressive role in leading the way to recognize and affirm the contributions of, and provide greater protections to, local LGBTQ residents. The City had previously updated its Personnel Manual language, adopted several LGBTQ History Month Proclamations, and passed a 2015 Resolution providing that the City’s prohibition of sex discrimination included in the City’s personnel policies and Civil Rights Ordinance should be interpreted to guard against the use of assumptions and stereotypes associated with sexual orientation and gender identity.

Although praising these efforts, recently elected Mayor Breea Clark knew the City could do better and has made it a priority of her administration to further build on these previous efforts and identify more tangible ways that the City can continue to build a more inclusive community for all residents. On August 27, 2019, less than sixty days into her administration, the City passed ordinance amendments to its Civil Rights Ordinance that provide express nondiscrimination protections for sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and marital status, including marriage to a

person of the same sex, in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations. The amendments also increased employment protections for all protected characteristics by expanding the definition of employer. Mayor Clark noted that these amendments were necessary to bridge the existing gap for Norman workers, including LGBTQ employees, who work for smaller employers not otherwise covered under state or federal nondiscrimination laws. Mayor Clark also prioritized appointing formal Executive and Norman Police Department LGBTQ liaisons to streamline communication with the local LGBTQ community. The City also amended its nondiscrimination contractor policy to ensure that all contractors that conduct business with the City also adhere to these antidiscrimination provisions. These bold actions significantly increased Norman’s MEI score to 92. Mayor Clark truly believes that Norman is the best city in the State of Oklahoma and is proud of the fact that Norman is a welcoming and inclusive community for all residents to live, work, and play.

**BREEA CLARK
MAYOR**

Norman is a welcoming and inclusive community for all residents to live, work, and play.

SUCCESS STORY: ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

Anchorage, Alaska is the gateway to America's Arctic, and among the most culturally diverse cities in the United States. We are home to the most diverse neighborhoods and the most diverse schools in the country. Our city is home to cultures and traditions from around the globe and from across the North—and our city is especially honored to sit on the ancestral homelands of the Dena'ina Athabaskans, where people have lived and welcomed newcomers for thousands of years.



This tradition and spirit of welcoming defines us. Living in the remote corner of the U.S., we rely on each other not just for success, but for survival. We know that when a snowstorm threatens our safety, what matters is our willingness to extend a hand, not what color or political persuasion or sexual orientation or gender identity may be on the other end of that hand.

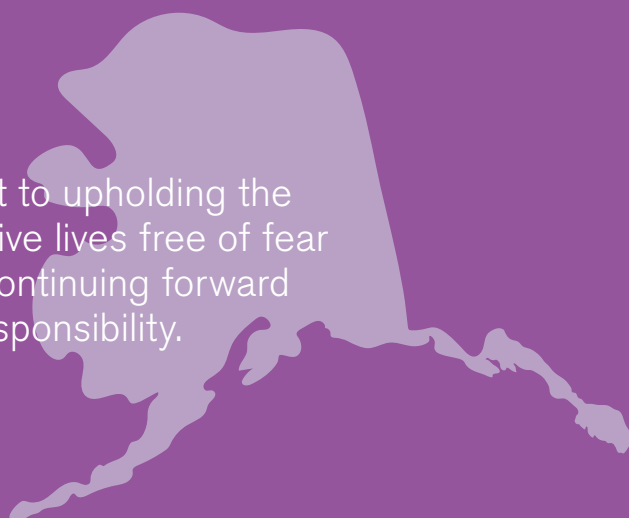
My administration strives to ensure that everyone in Anchorage feels safe and secure. No matter where we come from, or who we love, our city is committed to the ideals of equity and opportunity. In Anchorage, municipal employees have access to gender-affirming health care. I appointed an LGBTQ liaison, sponsored summits focused on LGBTQ issues, and support numerous community-based organizations dedicated to upholding the rights of all residents. Protecting LGBTQ rights is every bit as much of ensuring that we are a welcoming community as our efforts to combat racism, promote gender equity, and welcome newcomers—all to achieve a cohesive community in which every resident knows that they belong.

After decades of advocacy and organizing by LGBTQ community members, in 2015 the Anchorage Assembly passed a non-discrimination ordinance that outlawed discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in employment, housing, and public spaces. When a ballot measure threatened to strip trans Anchorage residents of those protections, trans-identifying community members led a coalition of LGBTQ people and allies, religious organizations, and businesses to defeat the measure, making Anchorage the first U.S. city to defeat a ballot measure that would have forced transgender residents to use facilities that are inconsistent with their gender identity. In 2017, Anchorage voters elected two openly gay people to the City Assembly.

In Anchorage, we commit to upholding the rights of all residents to live lives free of fear and full of opportunity. Continuing forward remains our collective responsibility.

**ETHAN BERKOWITZ
MAYOR**

In Anchorage, we commit to upholding the rights of all residents to live lives free of fear and full of opportunity. Continuing forward remains our collective responsibility.



SUCCESS STORY: RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Since taking office in 2017, Mayor Stoney has devoted time and resources to ensuring that Richmond becomes an inclusive place to not only visit, but to live. This means that we must take care of and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community.

Before Mayor Stoney took office, Richmond's score on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index (MEI) was 46 out of 100. Using the MEI scorecard as a policy guide, Richmond created a Human Rights Commission, established non-discrimination laws, assigned a policy advisor as an LGBTQ+ liaison, and provided transgender-inclusive health benefits for city employees.



Reflecting on these changes, the most challenging policy to implement was the establishment of the non-discrimination laws. Since Virginia is a Dillon Rule state, localities like Richmond have not been given the authority to create non-discrimination laws. But, Richmond decided to move forward anyways and incorporate such laws within the ordinance establishing their Human Rights Commission. "We decided to take a risk and incorporate these legal protections because we thought they were too important to ignore," said Mayor Stoney.

Within a year Richmond was able to increase its score to 94—the highest MEI score in Virginia—and was named an MEI All-Star city for "boldly leading the way toward LGBTQ+ equality." Out of the 506 municipalities scored in 2018, the City of Richmond experienced the most significant score increase nationwide.

"I have always said that no matter the color of your skin, the neighborhood you live in, or who you love, that you are welcome in the City of Richmond—and these policy

changes were a critical part of our progress towards supporting and protecting Richmond's LGBTQ+ community," said Mayor Stoney.

The City of Richmond is not going to stop there. Most recently, Mayor Stoney introduced and city council approved a resolution supporting the prohibition of conversion therapy in the city and across the Commonwealth of Virginia. "We must strongly state our values as a city and push back against the state when necessary—such as against the cruel practice of conversion therapy," stated Mayor Stoney.

The City of Richmond appreciates the dedicated work of the Human Rights Campaign to guide cities towards LGBTQ+ equality.

**LEVAR M. STONEY
MAYOR**

I have always said that no matter the color of your skin, the neighborhood you live in, or who you love, that you are welcome in the City of Richmond.

SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY FLORIDA

Florida continues to lead the South in local policy advances protecting our LGBTQ community. Nearly 12 million Floridians—roughly 60% of our state—are protected from discrimination at the local level. To date, 21 municipalities have enacted protections against the harmful practice of conversion therapy, creating important upward pressure for statewide change.



Florida is a perennial swing state for national elections, but its decidedly skewed state legislature has resisted tackling LGBTQ issues. To meet this challenge, Florida's LGBTQ community has been carving out victories at the city and county level. Recently, addressing the deceptive and debunked practice of conversion therapy has been an important fixture of our statewide strategy.

Local activists in Miami-Dade and Palm Beach Counties advanced the first protections against conversion therapy on minors in our state. Just a few years later, when Alachua County enacted similar protections in 2019, it became the 21st local government in Florida to do so and the first in the more conservative North Florida region.

Equality Florida works in coalition with support from national partners to convene local advocates who support anti-conversion therapy protections. When we approach local governments about this dangerous and fraudulent practice, we invariably also mention that enacting protections is credited in

MEI scores. The MEI helps create a measurable, friendly rivalry that excites local governments to keep pace with or surpass other local governments. When we pass one ordinance, we leverage the win to push other local governments.

Enacting local anti-conversion therapy laws is providing vital protections for vulnerable LGBTQ youth. At the same time, it's also providing a roadmap for state-level progress.

Using the MEI, Equality Florida and our local partners are working every day to end this harmful practice forever. When we rack up enough wins, we'll finally change the climate in our legislature and shift the dial statewide. Together we are changing hearts, minds, and laws in the country's third-largest state.

**JOSEPH SAUNDERS
SENIOR POLITICAL DIRECTOR
EQUALITY FLORIDA**

Enacting local anti-conversion therapy laws is providing vital protections for vulnerable LGBTQ youth. At the same time, it's also providing a roadmap for state-level progress.



SUCCESS STORY: EQUALITY VIRGINIA

For the past six years in Virginia, the Republican-controlled Senate has passed legislation to protect LGBTQ people from discrimination. However, despite strong support from the Republican caucus, the leadership in the House of Delegates has failed to do the same, thereby repeatedly preventing Virginia from passing statewide nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people.



Due in part to the setbacks in the state legislature, advocates across the state have expressed increased interest in addressing these issues locally. We saw the MEI as a great place for these advocates to start. Equality Virginia sees the MEI not only as a tool to encourage local activism, but also to create more visibility for the LGBTQ community and build broader support for nondiscrimination protections at the state level.

A great example of the MEI being a tool for both advocacy and visibility occurred in Richmond just last year. When Mayor Stoney came into office, he saw many opportunities to improve the lives of LGBTQ residents and city employees. Some of his measures were symbolic, like flying Pride flags at Brown's Island and the downtown train station. Others were policy enhancements, such as working with City Council to establish a Human Rights Commission and nondiscrimination laws, designating a policy advisor to serve as the Mayor's LGBTQ Liaison, and offering transgender-inclusive health benefits for city employees.

These efforts did not go unnoticed. Before Mayor Stoney took office, Richmond's score on the MEI was 46 out of 100. Mayor Stoney remembers learning about the score in 2017 and feeling challenged to put major changes in place. He told his team, "We've got to do better; to be competitive in the New South we must lean into inclusivity." Within a year Richmond was able to increase its score to 94 – the highest MEI score in Virginia—and was named an MEI All-Star city for "boldly leading the way toward LGBTQ equality."

Inspired by this remarkable success, we look forward to other advocates and elected officials in Virginia following the lead of Richmond and other long-time leaders in the state like Arlington County and Alexandria.

**VEE LAMNECK, MSW
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
EQUALITY VIRGINIA**

Equality Virginia sees the MEI not only as a tool to encourage local activism, but also to create more visibility for the LGBTQ community and build broader support for nondiscrimination protections at the state level.

SUCCESS STORY: STATE COLLEGE, PENNSYLVANIA

Our local protections against conversion therapy is more than just a local law. It's a message to the community—locally, nationally, and internationally—that everyone is loved and part of State College. That's the overall goal with all of our LGBTQ initiatives: to promote diversity and equality as social pillars of the community.



Protecting our youth from conversion therapy is not the only thing State College is doing to emphasize the importance of diversity and equality. State College created an Advisory

Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Matters to help further inclusivity by providing unique insights and ideas on what State College can do to improve its rating in the Municipal Equality Index. We're proud to offer protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, and public accommodations. And we're proud to have achieved a perfect MEI score for the first time this year.

Penn State University attracts a diverse population to our community and it's our duty to make these students and faculty feel welcomed. This past year we partnered with Penn State for Pride Month and hung rainbow banners from April until the end of June to ensure students attending the university had the opportunity to see these banners hanging in their community. All of our local accomplishments would not be possible without support from community members that volunteer on State College's LGBTQ Advisory Committee and our local elected officials.

**KEVIN KASSAB
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
MANAGER AND LGBTQ LIAISON**

Our local protections against conversion therapy is more than just a local law. It's a message to the community—locally, nationally, and internationally—that everyone is loved and part of State College.

SUCCESS STORY: GEORGIA EQUALITY

For the past seven legislative sessions, Georgia Equality has partnered with HRC and a number of national and local organizations to successfully prevent any anti-LGBTQ legislation from becoming law in Georgia.



While we are proud of this effort, simply fighting off bad legislation is not enough. That is why we launched the Georgia Unites Against Discrimination campaign in 2015. It is an effort to educate the public on the need to protect all Georgians, including those of us in the LGBTQ community, from discrimination.

Central to this effort has been the goal of building bi-partisan support for statewide non-discrimination legislation by passing local ordinances. While Atlanta passed an ordinance nearly 20 years ago, it has only been within the past two years that we have been able to build the momentum to enact comprehensive ordinances that address discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations elsewhere. The effort started in late 2017, when Doraville City Councilwoman Stephe Koontz, the only openly transgender office holder in Georgia, worked with her colleagues to become the first city other than Atlanta to pass such an ordinance.

In less than two years, nearly a dozen cities now have ordinances with a

half dozen additional cities around the state currently considering them. These range from small municipalities such as Clarkston, considered one of the most diverse cities in America due to its large per capita immigrant population, to larger and more conservative cities such as Dunwoody, which passed their ordinance with a unanimous vote, and rural communities such as Statesboro, located in southeast Georgia.

In 2020, we have worked closely with the new Mayor and city leadership of Savannah to not only adopt a comprehensive non-discrimination ordinance, but to use the MEI as a roadmap of reforms that will ensure that LGBTQ folks who live, work or visit there will be treated with fairness and equality. By nearly doubling their MEI score in less than a year, they are poised to be the best example of how local advocates can work in partnership with elected officials to ensure the promise of equality in the communities we call home.

**JEFF GRAHAM
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
GEORGIA EQUALITY**

Central to this effort has been the goal of building bi-partisan support for statewide non-discrimination legislation by passing local ordinances.



SUCCESS STORY: DECATUR, GEORGIA

The City of Decatur, Georgia is 4.5 square miles in size with a population of 23,000 located 6 miles east of Atlanta. We are an urban city that values and is committed to equity, inclusion and diversity.



We have worked closely with the Human Rights Campaign to understand and apply the standards associated with the Municipality Equality Index because we believe that LGBTQ-inclusion is critical to our commitment of being a Welcoming City. We have a high population of LGBTQ residents and business owners and they are an important part of the fabric of our community.

I am proud to announce that Decatur passed a non-discrimination ordinance in November 2019. The ordinance prohibits local businesses from discriminating based on sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as race, religion, color, sex, disability, national origin, ancestry, age or military status. Discrimination is prohibited in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodation. No federal or Georgia state law expressly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

We followed in the footsteps of the City of Atlanta and four other DeKalb County cities becoming the 6th city in Georgia to adopt a non-discrimination ordinance. Decatur is committed to the values of equity, inclusion and

diversity and the adoption of this ordinance was a tangible way to demonstrate that commitment.

In addition, we passed a resolution urging the State of Georgia to adopt a broad and comprehensive hate crimes act through prompt legislative action stating that “the Mayor and Commission believe that such hate crimes act should protect the widest range of vulnerable persons.”

We appreciate the HRC and the MEI team working in partnership with us to modify some of the language in standards geared to large cities in order to reach and include smaller municipalities who strive to ensure LGBTQ inclusion in all areas of community work, life and play. Working with HRC and the MEI team, the City of Decatur was able to identify areas to codify existing practices, pass ordinances and document our commitment and in doing so, and raise our MEI score from 51 points in 2017 to 86 points in 2020. We are proud of the accomplishment!

**PATTI GARRETT
MAYOR**

We have a high population of **LGBTQ residents and business owners** and they are an important part of the fabric of our community.



SUCCESS STORY: OVERLAND PARK, KANSAS

Inclusion has been part of Overland Park's identity since the City was incorporated on May 20, 1960, when it absorbed unincorporated neighborhoods shunned by adjacent cities because of the religious faith of residents living in those neighborhoods.



Since then Overland Park has rapidly grown into the second most populous city in Kansas and the Kansas City metropolitan area. The City consistently achieves high national rankings because of its great schools, affordable living, diverse population, major corporations, abundance of retail, and many attractive amenities.

Recently nearly 1,000 residents and community leaders convened as part of the "ForwardOP" visioning process to outline Overland Park's path for the next 20 years and beyond. Participants identified eight major initiatives, including becoming a more inclusive community.

In response, in the spring of 2019 the City Council adopted a resolution directing staff to take actions to increase LGBTQ equality in Overland Park. Staff conducted LGBTQ-diversity training for law enforcement and other City personnel; adopted a policy prohibiting bullying based sexual orientation or gender identity on City facilities; modified several City Hall restrooms to be gender neutral; and advocated for state legislation prohibiting LGBTQ discrimination. In the fall of 2019, the City Council passed a nondiscrimination

ordinance prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Thanks to these efforts, in 2019 Overland Park became the largest city in Kansas to enact a nondiscrimination ordinance, achieved the highest MEI score in Kansas, and had the largest increase in MEI score of any city in the nation.

In 2020, Overland Park continued its efforts to advance LGBTQ equality. In July, the City requested that the Kansas Human Rights Commission (KHRC) interpret existing state laws prohibiting sex discrimination so those laws also prohibited discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. In August, the KHRC announced that they would adopt this interpretation prohibiting LGBTQ discrimination across the entire state of Kansas.

Overland Park has been a welcoming community since its very beginning, and we are thankful to the Human Rights Campaign for providing guidance on how to expand our culture of inclusivity to our LGBTQ community.

**CARL GERLACH
MAYOR**

Thanks to these efforts, in 2019 Overland Park became the largest city in Kansas to enact a nondiscrimination ordinance, achieved the highest MEI score in Kansas, and had the largest increase in MEI score of any city in the nation.

SUCCESS STORY: TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

As Mayor of Florida's capital city, I could not be prouder that Tallahassee has received a score of 100 on the Municipal Equality Index (MEI). I want members of the LGBTQ+ community to know that Tallahassee is a safe, welcoming, and inclusive city to live, work, and play.



The Tallahassee City Commission has been a leader in our community on LGBTQ+ equality since 2009, despite state limitations, when the City expanded our anti-discrimination policies to include sexual orientation and gender identity and enacted domestic partner benefits. For years, the MEI has been a critical benchmark for our continued commitment to advancing LGBTQ+ equality, and this year's perfect score represents the work of countless individuals over many years.

We have made great progress, but we know there is still more work to do. With the recent completion of our City's first comprehensive five-year strategic plan, we developed a new list of core values, including promoting equity and celebrating diversity. We got to work right away to implement these core values in tangible ways. In 2020, the City Commission unanimously passed the state's most inclusive conversion therapy ban with the assistance of many members of the public. We also capitalized on renovations underway in City Hall to build gender-neutral restrooms to ensure our facilities are more accessible to all.

As Mayor, I also took explicit steps to build a more fair, equitable, and inclusive city. Early in 2020, I created an LGBTQ+ Advisory Council, one of the first of its kind in the state, to evaluate City policies and services, identify deficiencies and gaps in service delivery, and provide feedback to my office on better serving the LGBTQ+ community. This Advisory Council of volunteer citizens has and will continue to use the MEI scorecard to identify opportunities for improvement.

It is one thing to say we are an inclusive city; it's another thing to actually implement policies and services that help every member of our community feel seen, heard, and valued. The MEI is an important tool in helping us be such a city, and we are thankful for the tireless work of the Human Rights Campaign to provide municipalities with a framework and tools that help us achieve these goals.

Keep an eye on Tallahassee. We scored 100 this year, but we're not done yet.

**JOHN E. DAILEY
MAYOR**

Tallahassee is an inclusive community that welcomes visitors with open arms and southern charm. Residents enjoy a high quality of life, which includes awe-inspiring natural beauty; creative, engaging public spaces; and a full-service city government that redefines the standard of public service.

SUCCESS STORY: FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

When we began this journey, we knew it was paramount to center the Municipal Equality Index as a framework for our focus.

Fort Collins prides itself on being a friendly and welcoming community and is consistently recognized as one of the best places to live in the country. Achieving a 100 score on the MEI is a necessary milestone in making clear to our LGBTQ+ residents and visitors that they are truly welcome, safe and valued in Fort Collins.

A seminal point in our City's equity journey was 2016, when staff formed an LGBTQ Subcommittee to address inequities for LGBTQ+ people in Fort Collins. In 2017, Fort Collins became a member of the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). In 2019, City Council adopted a priority for equity and inclusion. In the same year, we added the Municipal Equality Index to the set of metrics we use to evaluate our progress and success as both a public service provider and an employer.

Centering equity through these frameworks empowered staff to prioritize service and relationship building for our underserved populations. However, our momentum and progress wouldn't have been possible without leveraging the unwavering passion of City staff who elevate issues and collaborate for innovative solutions with leadership buy-in and strategic guidance and support.



The LGBTQ Subcommittee has since evolved into the City's PRIDE Employee Resource Group. This team of staff volunteers have worked tirelessly for our queer community—in coordination with community stakeholders, City departments and executive leaders—and have been integral to many of our City's inclusive updates over the last several years. This includes revising our purchasing policy to include all queer identities in our non-discrimination clause, establishing liaisons in Police, Human Resources and in the City Manager's Office, and adding a full suite of trans-inclusive healthcare benefits for our employees.

When we began this journey, we knew it was paramount to center the Municipal Equality Index as a framework for our focus. We are incredibly proud to achieve a 100% score and of what we have accomplished in such a short time. We are excited to find even more ways to support and celebrate our LGBTQ+ community in Fort Collins!

**HEATHER COX
CO-CHAIR, PRIDE EMPLOYEE
RESOURCE GROUP**

SUCCESS STORY: SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA

Scottsdale has earned a positive international reputation as a hospitable oasis in the desert. By adopting [our] anti-discrimination ordinance, our code of conduct now matches our openness and western hospitality.

When Scottsdale City Council and I unanimously adopted a comprehensive anti-discrimination ordinance in April 2021, we affirmed Scottsdale as a place for all people.

The city of Scottsdale is committed to fair treatment of residents, visitors and employees, and we support and value diversity and inclusiveness.

Since we adopted the anti-discrimination ordinance, the broad support expressed across our community has been very gratifying. We received encouragement and endorsement from private citizens, faith-based communities, and international corporations, and the message was clear:

Scottsdale has earned a positive international reputation as a hospitable oasis in the desert. By adopting this anti-discrimination ordinance, our code of conduct now matches our openness and western hospitality.

When I first served on the Scottsdale City Council 20 years ago, we had just established the Human Relations Commission, and an Office of Diversity.



I was proud to help Scottsdale begin the important journey toward a Scottsdale for all. Adoption of our ordinance did not mark the end of that journey, but it was an incredibly important step.

The efforts of our Human Relations Commission and other community diversity partners throughout have raised awareness of the many challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community. There is much work left to do, and we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with others in the effort.

We are raising awareness, encouraging individualism, promoting unity and community, and providing safe work and living spaces. With this sincere commitment, we are proud to continue the work of so many to improve Arizona and the nation, one city at a time.

No matter who you are or who you love, you are welcome in Scottsdale.

**DAVID D. ORTEGA
MAYOR**

SUCCESS STORY: SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA

Today, City staff are working with community partners and others committed to equity and inclusion to address emerging issues facing those who identify as LGBTQ+, including expanding gender inclusion, supporting LGBTQ+ youth programming, and addressing issues facing our LGBTQ+ communities of color.

Santa Monica is known worldwide as a welcoming place to live, work, and visit. The City, known for its progressive and inclusive policies, has established LGBTQ+ liaisons in our City Manager's Office and Police Department. We have expanded protections and benefits for LGBTQ+ staff and their families, residents, and contractors.

Today, City staff are working with community partners and others committed to equity and inclusion to address emerging issues facing those who identify as LGBTQ+, including expanding gender inclusion, supporting LGBTQ+ youth programming, and addressing issues facing our LGBTQ+ communities of color.

Santa Monica is committed to ending the legacy of binary gender identifiers in many areas. City staff are trained on gender inclusive practices for City locker rooms and the City is actively working to transition our single-use restrooms and changing rooms to be all-gender.

The City Council has allocated funds to support those looking to change their gender identification by funding Trans Equity Scholarships that subsidize court and administrative fees for those who live and work in Santa Monica. To do this, the City has partnered with the Church in Ocean Park, a non-profit, non-denominational church committed to equity and inclusion.



Santa Monica is also committed to expanding protections for LGBTQ+ youth who are at increased risk of bullying. The City has implemented a comprehensive anti-bullying initiative including training for all City youth programs. Queer Prom, hosted at the City's Annenberg Community Beach House, welcomes LGBTQ+ youth and allies to celebrate a time-honored high school tradition.

We extend an invitation to join us each June for SaMoPride. Co-sponsored by the City, Downtown Santa Monica, Inc., the Santa Monica Pier, and Santa Monica Place, SaMoPride is a community-wide celebration featuring local artists, non-profits, and businesses supporting the LGBTQ+ community.

Santa Monica thanks HRC for its guidance and expertise as we explore these and other issues. This collaboration has been fundamental to effectively serving our local LGBTQ+ community and welcoming visitors to our beachside city.

**SUE HIMMELRICH
MAYOR**

SUCCESS STORY: OUTNEBRASKA

We make it our business to know who is in the room, who wants to be involved, and what other community partners share our vision for equality.

OutNebraska launched as a statewide organization in 2019. In the years since, we have helped our communities grow in their advocacy, celebrations, and education of LGBTQ+ people.

Nebraska is home to numerous volunteer organizations working toward LGBTQ+ equality. As a staffed, statewide organization, OutNebraska is uniquely positioned to bring these different groups together. Through advocacy, celebration, and education, we have helped organizations and individuals across the state access resources and push for change. We make it our business to know who is in the room, who wants to be involved, and what other community partners share our vision for equality. That's where OutNebraska has really thrived: as a hub of information, resources, and connections. We have been proud to partner with national organizations like HRC and Equality Federation to bring their resources, knowledge, and experience home to organizers across the state.

From the panhandle to the Missouri river, Nebraska has seen improvement in acceptance for LGBTQ+ people and families. 2021 was the year of Pride. More Pride events happened in 2021 than ever before including in Alliance, Scottsbluff, Hastings, Grand Island, Lincoln, Omaha, Norfolk, and more. We are seeing more rural communities celebrating Pride and embracing LGBTQ+ members of their community more fully. Our second largest city, Lincoln, held its first ever Pride Parade in 2021, marching around the capitol building to say "We're here, we're queer, get used to it."



Support for LGBTQ+ Nebraskans has also come from our business communities and local city governments. We launched Nebraska Competes in April 2021, which is a nonpartisan coalition of businesses who believe Nebraska needs nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people. These businesses are located across the state, showing that Nebraska is ready to move to greater acceptance and inclusion.

Our city leaders are also coming out for equality. Lincoln's city council passed the Youth Mental Health ordinance in 2020 to prohibit the practice of "conversion therapy" on minors. The Omaha LGBTQ+ Mayor's advisory board (established in 2016) continues to point our largest city toward progress, and Lincoln celebrates its most diverse city council to date with three of its seven councillors identifying LGBTQ+ as.

OutNebraska has advised the city of Lincoln in its inclusive efforts, using the MEI as a tool to guide policy and improve its score. We are proud of the work we are supporting across the state and will continue our efforts to push LGBTQ+ equality forward in Nebraska.

**ABBI SWATSWORTH
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
OUTNEBRASKA**

SUCCESS STORY: FERNDALE, MICHIGAN

A city on the rise, Ferndale's revitalization is owed in large part to its LGBTQ+ leaders—past, present, and future—and the lessons they taught in embracing the equality of all races, ages, identities, and nationalities in our city.

Ferndale, Michigan has long had the community motto “Good Neighbors.” It can be interpreted many ways, but to us it captures the diversity of our residents and guests, the welcoming nature of our city, and the spirit of inclusivity we all share.

Ferndale is located just north of the shared 8 Mile Road border with Detroit, yet it has a unique character all its own. The modestly sized community of four-square miles and 21,000 residents boasts an equal mix of family-friendly neighborhoods, parks and green spaces, an active downtown district with award-winning retail and nightlife, and a small industrial and tech quarter. A city on the rise, Ferndale's revitalization is owed in large part to its LGBTQ+ leaders—past, present, and future—and the lessons they taught in embracing the equality of all races, ages, identities, and nationalities in our city.

Our government has followed suit, working to enact policies and practices that support our LGBTQ residents, businesses, visitors, and staff. In 2017, Ferndale became one of the first municipalities in the nation to permanently display the rainbow Pride flag in City Council Chambers, showcasing its importance and relevance alongside National, State, County, and City flags. Within the following two years, City Council passed an ordinance banning the practice of conversion therapy within city limits; installed the city's first rainbow crosswalk; and developed a unique partnership with Ferndale-based Affirmations, Metro Detroit's community services center for LGBTQ+ people and their allies. As part



of this partnership, the City appointed two staff LGBTQ+ liaisons—based out of City Hall and the Ferndale Police Department—who work one-on-one with community groups, advocate for policies that affect the LGBTQ+ community, advise the Mayor and City Council on LGBTQ+, and work to eliminate bigotry, discrimination, and prejudice on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity within Ferndale.

The City also prides itself on its inclusive policies for employees and their families. Our recruitment efforts for critical positions include advertising and outreach with Pridesource Media Group, helping ensure diversity in our candidate pools. We offer domestic partnership benefits and robust paid parental leave for all, including new adoptive parents. And, as of January 2021, all single-occupancy restrooms in City buildings have been designated all-gender.

Inclusive hospitality and 'Good Neighbors' are an essential part of who we are and what we do, and we're thrilled to be recognized by HRC with a 100 point 2021 Municipal Index score. Come and visit us anytime ... we'll have our Pride flag waving to welcome you!

**MAYOR MELANIE PIANA
FERNDALE CITY COUNCIL**