

WHY MUNICIPAL EQUALITY MATTERS IN THE MIDST OF A NATIONAL LGBTQ+ STATE OF EMERGENCY

NATIONAL STATE OF EMERGENCY FOR LGBTQ+ PEOPLE

On June 6, 2023, the Human Rights Campaign declared a **state of emergency** for LGBTQ+ people in the United States for the first time ever. The unprecedented level of attacks against LGBTQ+ people by state legislatures—which retread vintage homophobic/transphobic campaigns of the past—are not reflective of emerging issues, but rather a coordinated, top-down moral panic driven by a few well-funded and well-connected organizations. These bills aim to legislate LGBTQ+ people out of all aspects of daily life, through rolling back existing legal protections, reducing LGBTQ+ visibility, and attempts to reduce the cultural and social acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.



Over 500 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced nationwide in 2023, with over 80 of them becoming law. These include efforts to prevent transgender people from accessing medically necessary healthcare, bills to stop transgender kids from participating in sports and from using bathrooms and locker rooms that align with their gender identity, and even bills that prohibit acknowledgement of LGBTQ+ people or topics in schools.

STATE OF EMERGENCY FOR CITIES THAT CARE ABOUT LGBTQ+ PEOPLE, TOO

Eleven previous editions of this report have documented the efforts hundreds of cities across the country have made to ensure that the LGBTQ+ community is treated fairly and included equitably in the laws and policies of those cities. Many cities have taken action to protect and include LGBTQ+ people even where the state or federal government has not. This twelfth edition in some ways shows more of the same—**more cities are receiving 100s than ever before**, and more cities took action to offer transgender-inclusive health benefits in city benefits packages too. However, a state of emergency cannot leave cities unscathed, and cities can only do so much to protect their employees from the harmful actions taken by the state government.

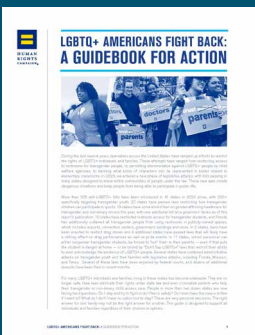
This year we have seen states such as Tennessee, Florida, Texas, Missouri, North Dakota, and too many other states implement draconian anti-LGBTQ+ laws that have made their states increasingly unlivable for LGBTQ+ people and their families. In response, we have seen LGBTQ+ people and their families be forced to flee their home states and relocate to states that will, for example, allow transgender youth to access the healthcare that will help them to grow and thrive.

Cities can only do so much. When states pass laws that prohibit public funds from paying for healthcare for transgender folks, the cities are bound by that law. The MEI (Municipal Equality Index) highlights that impact—nearly 20% of the cities rated in the 2023 MEI offered healthcare benefits that transgender employees or the transgender family members of city employees will not in fact be able to access. These benefits can be lifesaving and withholding healthcare from people because they are transgender is discrimination, simple. Loss of healthcare is a major catalyst for families fleeing their home states and the severity of the consequences of these laws cannot be overstated.

And yet, while cities are subject to these discriminatory state laws, they are far from helpless. In Missouri, despite a law banning healthcare for transgender minors, both Kansas City and Saint Louis took public stances against these laws and took steps to ensure that people knew their options about what transgender healthcare is and what people need to know to obtain it.

In Florida, where the attacks have been ongoing and high-profile, Saint Petersburg, Fort Lauderdale, and Orlando have continued to push for LGBTQ+ protections within their cities by publicly opposing anti-LGBTQ+ Florida legislative measures, signing on to LGBTQ+ youth pledges, and even improving their all-gender single occupancy facilities. Cities like these, which are used to receiving 100-point scores on the MEI, now do so with an enormous asterisk imposed by the state legislature: while the cities may be doing everything in their power to show that they remain welcoming places for the LGBTQ+ community, the state legislatures have been actively driving LGBTQ+ people and their families away with hostile, discriminatory laws. **The mental, emotional, and financial toll placed on families and individuals who must move due to statewide gender affirming care bans, anti-trans sports bans, prohibitions on correcting identity documents, and bans on LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum is immense and unjust.**

The MEI has always made this important distinction: it is an evaluation of the laws and policies of a city, not an evaluation of “best places to live.” That is because the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community is so significant—different people in the community will have fundamentally different experiences in the same city. That remains true and is especially true when it comes to these cities that have done everything in their power to be inclusive but are in states that have been overtly discriminatory. We know that cities will continue to fight for their communities regardless of what is happening in state legislatures.



Along with the state of emergency we have provided a national warning and downloadable guidebook for the LGBTQ+ community—including health and safety resources, a summary of state-by-state laws, “know your rights” information, and resources designed to support LGBTQ+ travelers as well as those already living in hostile states. This guidebook will arm LGBTQ+ people with resources and information to help ensure safety in all 50 states.

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