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First of its kind nationwide evaluation of LGBT inclusion in municipal law and policy finds cities need to do more to protect LGBT employees and citizens

WASHINGTON — A new report on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality in America's cities by the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest LGBT civil rights organization, rated 137 cities across the nation, including two Minnesota cities. The Municipal Equality Index (MEI), the first ever rating system of LGBT inclusion in municipal law, finds that while many U.S. cities lag behind in protections for LGBT people, some of the most LGBT-friendly policies in the country have been innovated and implemented at the municipal level, including in states with laws that are unfriendly to the LGBT community. The MEI was issued in partnership with the Equality Federation Institute and the Gay and Lesbian Victory Institute. The average score for cities in Minnesota is 79 out of 100 points, which exceeds the national average. Minneapolis scored 91 points, and St. Paul earned a 67.

Key findings from the MEI create a snapshot of LGBT equality in 137 municipalities of varying sizes drawn from every state in the nation – these include the 50 state capitals, the 50 most populous cities in the country, and the 25 large, 25 mid-size, and 25 small municipalities with the highest proportion of same-sex couples.

The 100-point cities in the MEI serve as shining examples of LGBT inclusivity, with excellent policies ranging from non-discrimination laws, equal employee benefits, and cutting-edge city services. As America moves forward in support of LGBT equality, cities across the country are on the forefront of this movement. Cities in every region of the country are fighting for equality at the most intimate level of government. At the same time, cities across the country also have room for improvement. The MEI articulates a path forward and celebrates the success of cities doing this important work.

MEI at a glance:

- Eleven of the 137 cities surveyed earned a perfect score of 100 points – these cities came from both coasts and in between, were of varying sizes, and not all are in states with favorable laws for LGBT people;
- A quarter of the cities rated scored over 80 points;
- 45 percent of cities surveyed obtained a score of 60 or higher;
- Nearly a third of cities scored between 40 and 60 points, showing good intentions on behalf of municipal governments but also opportunity for improvement; and
- Just under a quarter of the cities scored less than 20 points, including eight cities that scored under ten points and three that scored zero

The MEI rates cities based on 47 criteria falling under six broad categories:

- Non-discrimination laws;

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- Relationship recognition;
- The municipality's employment practices;
- Inclusiveness of city services;
- Law enforcement; and
- Municipal leadership.

In today's world, cities must compete for business and brain power. Research shows that to do this, they must treat their LGBT citizens with dignity and respect. Acclaimed Professor Richard Florida authored the forward for the MEI. Professor Florida is a pioneer in research into how the nurturing of a "creative class" (entrepreneurs, artists and architects, researchers, scientists, engineers, and other professionals) creates prosperous, economically competitive cities.

"Minnesota's municipalities have been leading the way forward toward fuller LGBT equality for the past several years," says OutFront Minnesota Legal Director Phil Duran, who coordinates much of the organization's local-government efforts. "We have been successful in working with leaders in 18 communities to draft and pass domestic-partner registration ordinances, and with elected and appointed officials in both Minneapolis and St. Paul to create stand-alone 'gender identity' categories within each city's non-discrimination ordinance. Many of these same cities also publicly opposed the marriage discrimination amendment on the November 2012 ballot. This local leadership will help move our legislature forward as well, particularly as these local leaders get elected to higher office."

"In Minnesota, there are 515 state laws that discriminate against same-sex couples and their families," said Ann Kaner-Roth, Executive Director of Project 515, a statewide advocacy organization that works towards equal rights and considerations under the law for same-sex couples. "It's encouraging to see the progress towards inclusion being made on the municipal level, just as leadership has been taken in Minnesota by the corporate community to ensure the most inclusive environments. We know inclusive and welcoming policies lead to greater productivity and community success. Ultimately this local leadership will provide guidance at the state level and we look forward to continuing to strive for inclusive policies for the state as a whole."

"Our nation is on an irreversible path forward in LGBT equality and local and state-level advocacy ensures our voices are heard in public squares across the country" said HRC President Chad Griffin. "This index gives advocates and municipal lawmakers a potent tool to improve the lives of LGBT people."

"Advances at the local level are often unheralded, but they are critical to building the momentum we need for statewide and federal victories," said Rebecca Isaacs, Executive Director of Equality Federation Institute. "The Municipal Equality Index not only recognizes the remarkable progress that state equality groups and local partners have made in cities and towns across the country, but is a powerful tool to help push local governments to do better."

HRC's new Municipal Equality Index details the state of LGBT equality in the Twin Cities

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"The freedom to be ourselves is most important where we live, work and raise our families. That's why it's so crucial that local and municipal governments understand the need to make life better for LGBT people. We work hard to make sure openly LGBT people participate in government as elected and appointed officials, and the MEI will be a great resource for them," said Chuck Wolfe, president and CEO of the Gay & Lesbian Victory Institute.

The full report, including long form scorecards for every city and a searchable database, is available online at www.hrc.org/mei .

The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all.