



City of Arts & Innovation

# News Release

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## **City of Riverside Scores High on National Assessment of LGBTQ Inclusivity**

*Municipal Equality Index score jumps from 65 to 91 in one year*

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – The City of Riverside greatly improved its 2019 ranking in the only nationwide assessment of LGBTQ inclusion in municipal law, policy and services, raising its score from 65 to 91 (out of a maximum score of 100) in one year. The results of the 2019 Municipal Equality Index were announced recently by the HRC Foundation in partnership with the Equality Federation Institute.

Factors in the MEI include whether cities have non-discrimination laws; what steps the municipality has taken as an employer to be more inclusive in municipal services and law enforcement; and the city leadership's public position on equality. The report and scorecards for cities are at [www.hrc.org/mei](http://www.hrc.org/mei).

Riverside's dramatic improvement in the 2019 MEI is a result of both changes the City has made recently and a renewed effort to ensure that steps the City already has taken are factored into the ranking process. The 2019 MEI, the eighth annual, rates 506 cities across the U.S. on 49 different criteria.

Riverside had one of the best scores in Riverside County, trailing only a handful of cities in the Coachella Valley. Ward 1 voters last month elected Riverside's first openly LGBTQ member of the City Council, Erin Edwards, who took office on Dec. 7.

"It is important that the LGBTQ+ community feels comfortable and safe in Riverside, and the City's work to greatly improve our Equality Index score is a step in the right direction," Mayor Rusty Bailey said. "I am proud that our community continues to build on our tradition of inclusivity. We recently celebrated the 20-year anniversary of the Mayor's Multicultural Forum, and I look forward to presenting my Carlos E. Cortés Award for Championing Diversity and Inclusivity at the annual State of the City address."

Riverside and other cities in California received some of their respective scores by virtue of state laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in the areas of employment, housing and public accommodations. For example, state law helped cities get 30 out of

30 possible points in this area, plus 4 bonus points because the state requires single-occupancy, all-gender facilities and also protects youth from gender conversion therapy.

But some cities, including Riverside, received points directly as a result of actions the cities have taken. Riverside, for example, received 23 points for actions it has taken as an employer, including prohibiting discrimination in city employment, ensuring discrimination does not occur in the city contracting process, and for offering benefits to the domestic partners of city employees.

Riverside received 10 points for having a Human Relations Commission and – for the first time – having an LGBTQ liaison to the City Manager’s Office; 22 points on police matters for having a liaison to the LGBTQ community and for accurately reporting hate crime statistics to the FBI; and 2 points for leadership on LGBTQ equality.

“This year’s Municipal Equality Index shows that across the country, city leaders are working tirelessly to ensure that their constituents can secure housing, make a living and participate in community life without being discriminated against because of who they are,” said HRC President Alphonso David.

Other cities in Inland Southern California that were included in the study include: Corona (MEI score 59), Fontana (59), Moreno Valley (60), Ontario (52), Rancho Cucamonga (68) and San Bernardino (53).

Cities in Riverside County that scored exceptionally well include: Palm Springs (100), Rancho Mirage (100), Cathedral City (96) and Palm Desert (94).

“Riversiders can be proud of their government and its effort to ensure a culture of diversity and inclusion,” Mayor Pro Tem Andy Melendrez said. “From our Inclusivity Statement, to our Day of Inclusion, to our annual Dr. Carlos E. Cortés Award for Championing Diversity and Inclusivity – Riverside reinforces our values in our daily thoughts and actions.”