

## **DURHAM GETS TOP STATE SCORE FOR LGBT RESIDENT TREATMENT**

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DURHAM — For the second year in a row, the town of Durham has received the highest score in the state rating the equal treatment of LGBT residents, according to the Human Rights Campaign's 2014 Municipal Equality Index.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) evaluated Durham, along with Concord, Derry, Manchester and Nashua.

The HRC is the largest civil rights organization in the United States. Since 1980, the HRC has worked to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Americans.

The organization's municipal equality index (MEI) examines the laws, policies, and services of municipalities and rates them on the basis of their inclusivity of LGBT people who live and work there. In 2014, a total of 353 towns and cities from every state in the country were rated, an increase of more than 60 cities rated in 2013.

These rated communities include the top three largest cities or municipalities in every state, all 50 state capitals, the city home to the state's largest public university, and 75 cities or municipalities that have high proportions of same-sex couples.

The MEI scores municipalities on a scale of 100 points in six different categories. Twenty bonus points are also available.

The community is judged on its non-discrimination laws, how well the municipality recognizes the relationships of LGBT community members, and if the municipality, as an employer, offers equal benefits to LGBT employees and awards contracts to fair-minded businesses.

Additionally, the community is judged on how well the municipality attempts to include LGBT constituents in city services and programs, how law enforcement deals with crimes against the LGBT community, and the city's leadership commitment to fully include the LGBT community.

Durham has received a score of 76, up five points from last year. The town received perfect scores in the sections evaluating the services they provide to the LGBT community, how law enforcement deals with hate crimes, and how well the town recognizes LGBT relationships. The town also received two bonus points for providing services to support people living with HIV or AIDS.

Concord, Manchester, and Nashua all received a score of 52, while Derry received a score of 55. According to the results, these cities were received significantly lower scores for their attempts to include LGBT community members in city services and programs and how the municipality, as an employer, treats LGBT employees. These cities all scored zero on their relationship with the LGBT community.

Town Administrator Todd Selig, along with Town Council Chair Jay Gooze and Town Business Manager Gail Jablonski, created the town's Human Rights Commission to improve the town's relationship with the LGBT community after the 2013 scores were announced.

"We were predisposed to be equal opportunity focused," Selig said. "The Human Rights survey caused us to, for the first time, evaluate ways we might inadvertently have created processes and procedures that may have been discriminatory."

Selig says the town has a simple philosophy on the treatment of all members of the community, "treat others in the manner in which you would like them to treat you."

"Durham is a progressive community and we work to ensure the Town's business practices are reflective of the values of our citizens," Selig said. "It's really a basic philosophical approach to local governance: either everyone counts or no one counts."

"In Durham, everyone counts whether this relates to equal, unbiased enforcement of local ordinances or issues surrounding race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, place of birth, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, domestic partner or marital status, disability, HIV status, weight, or height."

Jablonski said the town has been working diligently to ensure that municipal LGBT workers receive equal benefits, as well as working with contractors building in town to make sure they meet those same requirements.

She added that the Durham Police Department has been working with liaisons from the LGBT community that attend UNH.

"What we've been doing is making sure the town is somewhere the LGBT community is comfortable with," she said.

Jablonski said the town still has plans to make improvements to make sure everyone in the community feels included.

"As far as the recreation programs, they are open to anyone, but it's not specifically stated anywhere," she said. "We want everyone to know that our programs are available to everyone."