

**RICHMOND, VA**  
**Mayor Levar Stoney**

## **THE CAPITAL OF INCLUSION**

When first taking office, Mayor Levar Stoney set a goal of making the City of Richmond more inclusive and welcoming to ALL people, no matter their background, the color of their skin, where they live, or who they love. The way to make the city more LGBTQIA+ friendly, he determined, was to work with the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), which each year rates cities across the United States based on their initiatives to support LGBTQIA+ communities. Their Municipal Equality Index (MEI) scorecard rates cities on a 0-100 scale on items such as non-discrimination laws, transgender-inclusive health benefits for city employees, inclusive workplaces, and LGBTQIA+ liaisons in the city's executive office, to name a few. The 2018 MEI rated 506 municipalities of varying sizes drawn from every state in the nation.

In 2016, Richmond received a 46 on the MEI scorecard; in 2017, Richmond received a 42. By working with City Council to establish a Human Rights Commission and non-discrimination laws, designating a policy advisor to serve as the Mayor's LGBTQIA+ liaison, and offering transgender-inclusive health benefits for city employees, Richmond's 2018 score increased to 94 – a dramatic 52-point increase over 2017 and the highest MEI score in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Additionally, Richmond was named an MEI All-Star by the Human Rights Campaign for being a city boldly leading the way toward LGBTQ+ equality.

Richmond's MEI score is important for a number of reasons. First, no one should be discriminated against based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. By passing holistic non-discrimination laws, which would protect Richmonders from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, age, economic status, sex, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and by creating a Human Rights Commission, which is designed to assist those who believe their human rights have been violated, Richmond sends a clear message that all people are welcome, equal, and protected in the city.

Secondly, cities should take these matters seriously because it helps them attract new business. By being inclusive, cities can become more competitive and attract not only new business, but strong employees. Richmond has already started to experience the benefits of becoming more LGBTQIA+ inclusive: This year, Richmond will play host to the Diversity Sports Jubilee, a multi-sport tournament featuring LGBTQIA+ athletes from around the world – something that would not have been possible had the city not made its recent, notable strides toward inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ community. Mayor Stoney says his administration intends to continue working to make Richmond even more inclusive in the years ahead.

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