

TAKING STEPS TOWARDS EQUALITY inGAITHERSBURG

“Until full nationwide equality is realized, cities must continue to lead the way on vital protections for LGBTQ residents, visitors, and workers.”

– Human Rights Campaign

by Amy McGuire, Communication Specialist

For the last 10 years, the Human Rights Campaign has released a Municipal Equality Index (MEI), an initiative that evaluates the inclusivity of laws, policies and services of U.S. municipalities of all sizes. This nationwide evaluation of municipal law demonstrates the ways cities support LGBTQ+ residents and workers.

A scorecard awards points in the areas of:

- Non-Discrimination Laws
- Municipality as an Employer
- Municipal Services
- Law Enforcement
- Leadership on LGBTQ+ Equality

Over the years, the City of Gaithersburg has adopted policies and initiatives to make it more inclusive, affirming a strong commitment to stand up for fairness and equality in protecting LGBTQ+ members of the community. The MEI benchmarking tool helps Gaithersburg take stock of progress, recognize achievements, and evaluate what further policy changes need to be made. In 2021, Gaithersburg achieved a perfect score of 100.

“As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I believe that it is extremely important that cities take an active role in ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of government and beyond,” says Deputy City Manager Dennis Enslinger. “These efforts can provide educational opportunities and serve as a role model for other organizations and businesses, furthering support for all in the community.”

Non-Discrimination Laws

The City earned points on the MEI scorecard for its non-discrimination laws with respect to employment, housing and public accommodations. Additional points were awarded to the City for having all-gender single occupancy facilities.

Municipality as an Employer

Gaithersburg earned points for its non-discrimination ordinance in place for City contractors, vendors and community service grantees. All businesses with contracts for goods or services are required to have an employee nondiscrimination policy. The City also requires all contractors to have a signed Certification of Compliance with the City’s Racial Equity and Anti-Discrimination Policy.

The City achieved points for being an inclusive workplace. Starting with its hiring practices, the City does not allow discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and seeks opportunities to advertise positions with LGBTQ+ affiliate organizations. Staff and volunteers are also required to attend regular awareness seminars on LGBTQ+ issues.

The City also provides transgender-inclusive healthcare benefits and has for many years.*

Municipal Services

In 2019, Gaithersburg established designated LGBTQ+ Liaisons within the City Manager’s Office and Police Department, earning points on the MEI scorecard. “These Liaisons provide residents and staff who have a specific LGBTQ+ issue or concern a direct line to the City’s upper administration,” says Dennis. “They also act as facilitators to resolve any concerns or issues.” The City Manager’s Office Liaison is currently working with staff on

MEI SCORES

2021: 100

2020: 93

2019: 93

2018: 57

2017: 59

2016: 59

2015: 59

(2012 - 2014:
GAITHERSBURG
NOT SCORED)

inclusive programming ideas for the organization and community.

Points were also given for the City's youth bullying prevention policy. Gaithersburg youth programs require participants to sign and acknowledge statements that they will abide by the City's youth bullying prevention requirements.

Services are also provided to LGBTQ+ youth, LGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness and LGBTQ+ older adults through a number of programs and services provided by its community partners.*

Law Enforcement

In addition to points awarded for designating an LGBTQ+ Police Liaison, the City earned points for its commitment to report hate crimes to the FBI.

Leadership on LGBTQ+ Equality

Gaithersburg achieved points for taking a public position on LGBTQ+ equality, for having leaders demonstrate pro-equality legislative and policy efforts, and for having openly LGBTQ+ elected or appointed leaders. The Mayor and City Council adopted a Resolution affirming the City's Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, Freedom, and Justice.

"We pride ourselves on being a welcoming community that values equity and inclusion," says Gaithersburg Mayor Jud Ashman. "Regardless of where you come from, your sexual orientation, or how you identify, we want all people to feel that Gaithersburg is a place where you can comfortably engage with your local government and enjoy freedom of expression."

View the full reports and scorecards at hrc.org/resources/municipal-equality-index.

Pride

In celebration and recognition of Pride Month, the City hosts a variety of community events in June. "When we think about diversity, the notions of inclusion and acceptance are so important," says Jason DeMarchi, Casey Community Center Facility Manager. "These programs and initiatives are a way for us to acknowledge this important community and let them know that in Gaithersburg they are seen, valued, and celebrated."

Storytelling programs sharing tales of inclusivity and acceptance are a highlight of the 2022 Pride Month celebrations. Casey Community Center will feature "Peanut Goes for the Gold" by Jonathan van Ness, a heartfelt story that follows a gender non-binary guinea pig who has their own unique way



2021 Pride Month Proclamation Recipient.

of doing things. The Community Museum will host Drag Queen Story Hour with Citrine, and Kentlands Mansion will hold its first "Equali-Tea," a tea and story hour with Lady J Monroe. Storytime at the Arts Barn will share the stereotype-breaking book, "Except When They Don't" by Laura Gehl."

"How do we put an end to the bullying of LGBTQIA+ kids? How do we convince young transgender and non-binary people that they matter in this world? We start with teaching acceptance," says Jason. "If we can share stories and facilitate programs that involve themes of acceptance, love, inclusion, kindness, compassion, embracing differences, and celebrating each other, then we are on our way to helping with larger, serious issues."

In addition to special programs, the Mayor and City Council issue an official proclamation designating June as Pride Month in Gaithersburg, with the Pride flag flying at City Hall.

In an effort to ensure all spaces in Gaithersburg are welcoming and safe for our LGBTQ+ community, additional inclusion training is being explored for City staff.

"We cannot truly provide a safe space for all if we are unable to understand things like the importance of pronouns, recognizing that couples and families come in all different types, learning current and appropriate terminology, the importance of helping someone find restroom facilities where they would feel comfortable, or stepping in when someone says hurtful, derogatory, homophobic, or transphobic statements to another participant," says Jason.

"Words matter. Feeling heard, understood, and respected matters. Finding programs that reflect our lives and interests matter."

For a full list of Pride Month activities visit gaithersburgmd.gov.

** Points were not awarded by the HRC for these initiatives because the City's partners do not exclusively serve the LGBTQ+ community and the City's current healthcare provider, CIGNA, does not provide individual city policy plan summaries.*

L = Lesbian	A = Asexual and/or Ally
G = Gay	+ = Plus all other gender identities & sexual orientations
B = Bisexual	
T = Transgender	
Q = Queer or Questioning	
I = Intersex	