

# EQUALITY RISING

OUT LEADERSHIP & THE ALLY COALITION  
DRIVING EQUALITY IN TENNESSEE

# TODD SEARS, Founder & CEO, Out Leadership

Equality Rising is a tool for business leaders across Tennessee to advocate for LGBTQIA+ equality from a business perspective at a time when trans and non-binary people, especially our youth, have never been under greater attack.

**The data reflect a clear and troubling trend: Tennessee continues to rank last, or near last, in virtually every measure of how it is respecting and protecting its LGBTQIA+ families.** By doing so, the state continues to mortgage its future in order to discriminate against its own citizens.

The data also show that 26% of LGBTQIA+ Americans have left anti-LGBTQIA+ states in the last two years and that LGBTQIA+ workers in the Southeast are 39% more likely to support inclusive businesses and 17% more likely to consider LGBTQIA+ friendliness in making spending decisions compared to non-LGBTQIA+ workers nationwide.

Moreover, Millennial and Gen Z consumers prefer to do business with companies with LGBTQIA+ friendly advertising and policies – 54% say they're more likely to choose an LGBTQIA+ inclusive brand over a competitor – which is why it's important that Tennessee continue to foster a business environment where being inclusive is supported.

LGBTQIA+ Tennesseans add billions of dollars to their local economies and to the state overall. Moreover, we know that states, cities, and municipalities that are more LGBTQIA+ friendly reap the benefits of the brightest minds. This commitment translates to a more competitive talent pool, increased consumer loyalty, and a better bottom line.

The most recent attacks on the LGBTQIA+ community in Tennessee, HB1 & HB3, are among the most extreme in the entire nation and directly target free expression, civil rights, healthcare, and equality for every citizen of Tennessee. The bills are wrong for business in Tennessee. They are wrong for equality in Tennessee, and they are wrong for the future of Tennessee.

In short, Tennessee is sacrificing its economic and talent future to advance a political agenda based on misinformation and fear.

**Equality Rising is a living roadmap for leaders in Tennessee, like you, who understand that navigating the landscape of equality, however complicated, is necessary for success.**

We have helped provide you with tools and information. Now, we call on you to use them to make an investment in equality that will protect your employees, benefit your bottom line, and help fight back against the encroachment of LGBTQIA+ rights here in Tennessee, and across the country.

Take what you have learned here back to your companies, your clients, and your colleagues and make real, lasting change.

**Let's move Tennessee forward together!**

Todd Sears



Out Leadership  
Non-Profit Partners



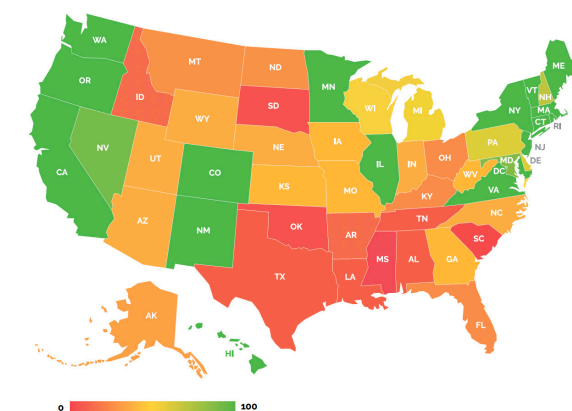
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The legal and cultural situation for LGBTQ+ people varies widely across the country. This map, based on each state's total Business Climate Score, illustrates the states where LGBTQ+ people are empowered to participate more fully and openly in the economy, and the states that are lagging behind.



“To be fully seen, heard & celebrated as our authentic selves is to heal not only our children but our inner child!”

**Mila Jam**  
Recording Artist, Senior Adviser for  
Trans initiatives, Out Leadership  
#OutLEADER





“I would say being trans is the opposite of being fake. It’s the most authentic version of almost any human being.”

**Martine Rothblatt,**  
CEO, United Therapeutics, Transgender Activist,  
Speaker at Out Leadership U.S Summit 2017  
#OutLEADER

# The State

In 2022, Tennessee had a score of 35.33 on the Out Leadership State LGBTQ+ Business Climate Index, a slight decline from its 2021 score.

That score placed Tennessee 48th out of all 50 states on the BCI across 22 measures of LGBTQIA+ equality in areas of:

- Legal & Non-Discrimination Policies
- Youth & Family Support
- Political & Religious Attitudes
- Health Access & Safety, and
- Work Environment & Employment

### Legal & Nondiscrimination Protections: 2/20

Not only does Tennessee lack LGBTQ+ discrimination protections, it has a law that prohibits local governments from expanding those protections to groups that aren't covered at the state level. The state does not allow trans people to change the gender markers on their birth certificates, and surgery is required to change a gender marker on a driver's license.

### Youth & Family Support: 10.72/20

Conversion therapy is legal in Tennessee. The state's Department of Children's Services operates using LGBTQ+ inclusive policies towards children.

### Political & Religious Attitudes: 7.6/20

State politicians have extensive records of voting and speaking against LGBTQ+ rights and protections. There is no "religious freedom" law, but state lawmakers often introduce bills with a religious component, such as bills that would render national same-sex marriage laws void.

### Health Access & Safety: 6/20

State Medicaid policy explicitly excludes transgender individuals in Tennessee. Hate crime protections exist for sexual orientation, but not for gender identity. It is a felony to knowingly expose someone else to HIV.

### Work Environment & Employment: 9/20

29% of transgender employees in Tennessee report being harassed in the past year due to their gender identity, and 43% report mistreatment such as being forced to use a restroom not matching their gender identity. 28% of LGBTQ+ Tennesseans report food insecurity, compared to 17% of non-LGBTQ+ Tennesseans.

2022 Rank	State	2021 Score	2022 Score	Score Change	2022 Rank	State	2021 Score	2022 Score	Score Change
1	New York	92.67	93.67	1.00	26	Kansas	59.63	58.83	-0.80
2	Connecticut	91.93	92.87	0.94	26	Utah	58.83	58.83	0.00
3	Massachusetts	91.33	91.67	0.34	28	Iowa	56.83	56.33	-0.50
4	New Jersey	87.33	90.33	3.00	29	North Carolina	52.63	55.48	2.85
5	Vermont	85.70	89.50	3.80	30	Arizona	58.67	55.47	-3.20
6	Maine	88.67	88.67	0.00	31	Ohio	48.90	53.43	4.53
7	Illinois	85.13	87.73	2.60	31	Florida	56.83	53.43	-3.40
8	Oregon	87.33	87.33	0.00	33	Georgia	50.73	52.73	2.00
9	California	86.50	86.50	0.00	34	Nebraska	52.23	52.23	0.00
10	Colorado	86.33	86.33	0.00	35	Missouri	51.93	51.13	-0.80
11	Minnesota	83.50	86.00	2.50	36	Wyoming	51.07	51.07	0.00
11	Hawaii	86.10	86.00	-0.10	37	Indiana	51.00	50.60	-0.40
13	Washington	85.83	85.83	0.00	38	Idaho	48.50	48.10	-0.40
14	Rhode Island	86.63	84.90	-1.73	39	Kentucky	44.83	46.93	2.10
15	New Mexico	85.17	84.77	-0.40	40	West Virginia	51.13	46.13	-5.00
16	Virginia	84.83	81.90	-2.93	41	Montana	52.90	46.10	-6.80
17	Nevada	78.67	81.67	3.00	42	Texas	45.03	45.63	0.60
18	Maryland	79.93	79.93	0.00	43	Alabama	42.23	41.83	-0.40
19	New Hampshire	77.33	78.33	1.00	44	Mississippi	38.10	37.90	-0.20
20	Michigan	67.53	75.03	7.50	45	Louisiana	36.83	36.43	-0.40
21	Delaware	70.87	70.87	0.00	46	Arkansas	36.33	35.93	-0.40
22	Wisconsin	67.80	70.30	2.50	47	South Dakota	36.38	35.83	-0.55
23	Pennsylvania	67.60	69.20	1.60	48	Tennessee	35.73	35.33	-0.40
24	Alaska	56.73	64.83	8.10	49	Oklahoma	37.70	35.30	-2.40
25	North Dakota	58.12	61.87	3.75	50	South Carolina	34.03	33.63	-0.40

Out Leadership 2022 LGBTQ+ State Business Climate Index: State rankings.

# Summary

3.5% of Tennessee residents identify as LGBTQ+. Conservatively, that's LGBTQ+ personal income of \$11.1 billion – it's a market businesses can't afford to ignore.

When LGBTQ+ employees don't feel welcome at work, they're less likely to stay, and employee turnover is a drag on the state economy and business competitiveness.

It costs companies an average of \$8,710 to replace an employee in Tennessee, and it can cost upwards of \$325,000 to replace senior executives.

Tennessee and the businesses operating there have strong incentives to create inclusive workplaces in the interest of keeping these costs down.

Tennessee has a regressive attitude towards trans people when it comes to anti-discrimination protections, gender markers on official documents, hate crimes protections and healthcare coverage. Treating trans people as unequal makes us look complicit if we choose to do business in Tennessee – equality is good business.

# The New Laws

## Senate Bill 1

SB 1 prohibits health care providers in Tennessee from prescribing age appropriate, medically necessary care such as puberty blockers or hormone therapy to transgender minors and prevents them from performing gender-affirming surgeries for transgender minors.

**HB 1 passed the TN Senate on January 27, 2022.**

## Senate Bill 3

SB 3 bans drag performances, defined as adult cabaret performances, from occurring in public or in the presence of children, as well as within 10,000 feet from schools, public parks, or places of worship.

Those found in violation of this law may be punished by a fine of up to \$2,500 and/or up to one year in jail.

**HB3 was signed into law by Governor Bill Lee on March 2, 2023.**

# Call to Action

Standing strong against attacks on our friends, families, community members and co-workers in Tennessee's LGBTQIA+ communities requires tangible, meaningful action.

Advancing equality in Tennessee, and around the nation, also requires a regular, sustained commitment to working with individuals and organizations, both local and national, who have the experience necessary to make change in Tennessee.

**We invite you to join Out Leadership in our efforts to advance equality across the globe and we suggest the following action items for you take, today, to impact equality in Tennessee.**

**Donate & provide support** directly to organizations led by LGBTQIA+ people and working to advance LGBTQIA+ rights in Tennessee:

**Tennessee Equality Project:** TEP advocates for the equal rights of LGBTQ people in Tennessee through legislative advocacy. They lobby the Tennessee General Assembly and local governments around the state. When there is an important federal issue, like anti-LGBTQ adoption issue language in legislation, they help amplify LGBTQIA+ voices to federal officials. <https://www.tnep.org>

**Inclusion Tennessee:** Inclusion Tennessee's mission is to connect people, opportunities, and resources to enrich and enhance the lives of the multi-faceted LGBTQIA+ community in Tennessee. <https://www.inclusiontn.org/>

**OUTMemphis:** OUTMemphis has been serving the LGBTQIA+ Community of the Mid-South for over 33 years, working to empower, connect, educate and advocate for our vibrant community. They provide dynamic, high-quality, life-enhancing programs and services that meet the diverse needs of the LGBTQIA+ community of all ages. <https://www.outmemphis.org/>

**Tennessee Pride Chamber:** The TN Pride Chamber of Commerce advances common business interests, economic growth, and

equality in the workplace and society for its LGBTQIA+ members, businesses, and allies by providing educational, networking, and community building opportunities. <https://www.tnpridechamber.com/>

**Nashville Launch Pad:** Nashville LAUNCH PAD is a volunteer-based initiative striving to provide street-free sleep to displaced young adults in Davidson County between the ages of 18-24 with a focus on being affirming and welcoming to LGBTQIA+ guests. <https://www.nashvillelaunchpad.com>

Support, internally and externally, **businesses, vendors, & partnerships** who are owned or operated by trans, non-binary and intersectional people.

Use your public platforms to show **direct support to LGBTQIA+ people**, especially those with trans, non-binary and intersectional LGBTQIA+ identities.

Directly **amplify the voices** of trans, non-binary & intersectional LGBTQIA+ people within your company, partnerships & industry.

**Let your elected officials** know that you support LGBTQIA+ people & policies, and oppose attacks on trans youth, art & expression, and health care.

To identify your Senator & Representative in the Tennessee General Assembly visit <https://capitol.tn.gov/legislators/>. To identify your U.S. Senator and Representatives in Congress visit <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>

**Advocate for vital legislation** which is necessary to the safety, security & prosperity of LGBTQIA+ Tennesseans including:

- Changes to Birth Certificates
- Changes to Drivers License
- A Ban on Conversion "Therapy"
- Prohibition on HIV Criminalization
- Inclusive Non-Discrimination Policies in Employment, Housing, Insurance, Education, & Public Accommodations



Out Leadership's 2022 LGBTQ+ State Business Climate Index and State CEO Briefs are essential tools for anyone involved in business today.

“Our intention is to speak to those queer children who are like us when we were that age. They need representation and visibility. They need to see people who are like us, or else they’re going to be lost and go down a dark path. That’s what we need to be afraid of, not a drag queen appearing in public.”

**Eureka O'Hara**  
Drag Performer, Transgender Activist,  
Star of HBO's "We're Here!"  
**#OutLEADER**

# About Out Leadership

Out Leadership is the world's premier global platform used by businesses to drive LGBTQ+ equality through talent development, advocacy, research, thought leadership, and networking, working closely with almost 100 of the world's greatest companies.

Get involved:  
[info@outleadership.com](mailto:info@outleadership.com)

