

## LGBTQ+ Business Climate Score

out of a possible 100 points

85.70

NO RISK

# Rhode Island

Out Leadership's Business Climate Index for the 50 United States is an assessment of states' performance on LGBTQ+ inclusion. It measures the impact government policies and prevalent attitudes have on the LGBTQ+ people residing in each state, quantifying the economic imperatives for inclusion and the costs of discrimination. It equips business leaders and policy makers with a clear sense of the most impactful steps states can take to make themselves more hospitable to forward-thinking, innovative, inclusive businesses.

## Color Coding

NO RISK	LOW RISK	MODERATE RISK	NOTABLE RISK	HIGH RISK
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For more context around these scores, and to learn more about the criteria we used to assess how state laws, actions and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people create business and talent risks, please visit [outleadership.com/driving-equality/us-state-ceo-briefs/](https://outleadership.com/driving-equality/us-state-ceo-briefs/)

# Rhode Island



## Legal & Nondiscrimination Protection

The Legal and Nondiscrimination Protections section includes two subsections: The **Personal Legal Scale** assesses the state's laws directly impacting LGBTQ+ individuals. This includes processes for transgender people to change their gender markers on birth certificates and driver's licenses, as well as protections for individuals in housing, the workplace, public spaces, foster care, and more. **Two Nondiscrimination Protections Scales** assess the extent to which LGBTQ+ people are protected under state law. One evaluates nondiscrimination laws related to employment and the other evaluates any nondiscrimination laws related to housing, public accommodations, credit and lending.

20<sub>/20</sub>



## Youth & Family Support

The Youth and Family Support section contains three subsections. The **Family Support Scale** measures how supportive the state is of LGBTQ+ people who are in or wish to start families. Elements of this scale include: the percentage of LGBTQ+ families raising children, and whether state family leave laws cover same-gender couples and allow workers to care for the children they are raising. The **Children and Youth Scale** assesses the resources available to LGBTQ+ children and youth in the state, including whether the state has non-discrimination laws and policies for LGBTQ+ students. The **Targeted Laws** section evaluates states on whether they ban discussion of same-gender marriage in schools, and whether they ban conversion therapy for minors.

18.10<sub>/20</sub>



## Political & Religious Attitudes

The Political and Religious Attitudes section contains two subsections. Taken together, these scales assess the tone of the state's conversation around LGBTQ+ rights. The **Religious Protections Scale** assesses the extent and impacts of a state's constitutional or statutory religious exemption laws, and whether state law provides for targeted religious exemption from laws governing child welfare services, private wedding services, and the provision of medical care. The **State Leadership Scores** are Out Leadership's unique measures evaluating the state's most senior elected officials – the Governor and the two U.S. Senators – and assessing how they've represented their views of LGBTQ+ people in speeches and in their political platforms, and in terms of how they've acted with regard to laws impacting LGBTQ+ equality.

18.6<sub>/20</sub>



## Health Access & Safety

The Health Access and Safety section contains two subsections. The **Health Scale** assesses LGBTQ+ people's access to insurance and medical care in each state, giving particular emphasis to the most economically precarious and vulnerable members of the community. The **Safety Scale** is based on two significant laws protecting or criminalizing behaviors affecting LGBTQ+ people. It asks whether the state protects LGBTQ+ people in its hate crime laws. It also assesses whether the state criminalizes exposure to or transmission of HIV.

15.0<sub>/20</sub>



## Work Environment & Employment

The Work Environment and Employment section contains two subsections. The **Work Environment Scale** assesses transgender individuals' experiences at work, including incidences of verbal harassment, sexual assault, and other mistreatment. The **Employment Scale** is based on assessments of LGBTQ+ employment in the state. This scale includes the percentage of LGBTQ+ people making less than \$24,000 annually (approximately the current Federal poverty line), and the differences in unemployment rates and food insecurity between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ identified individuals.

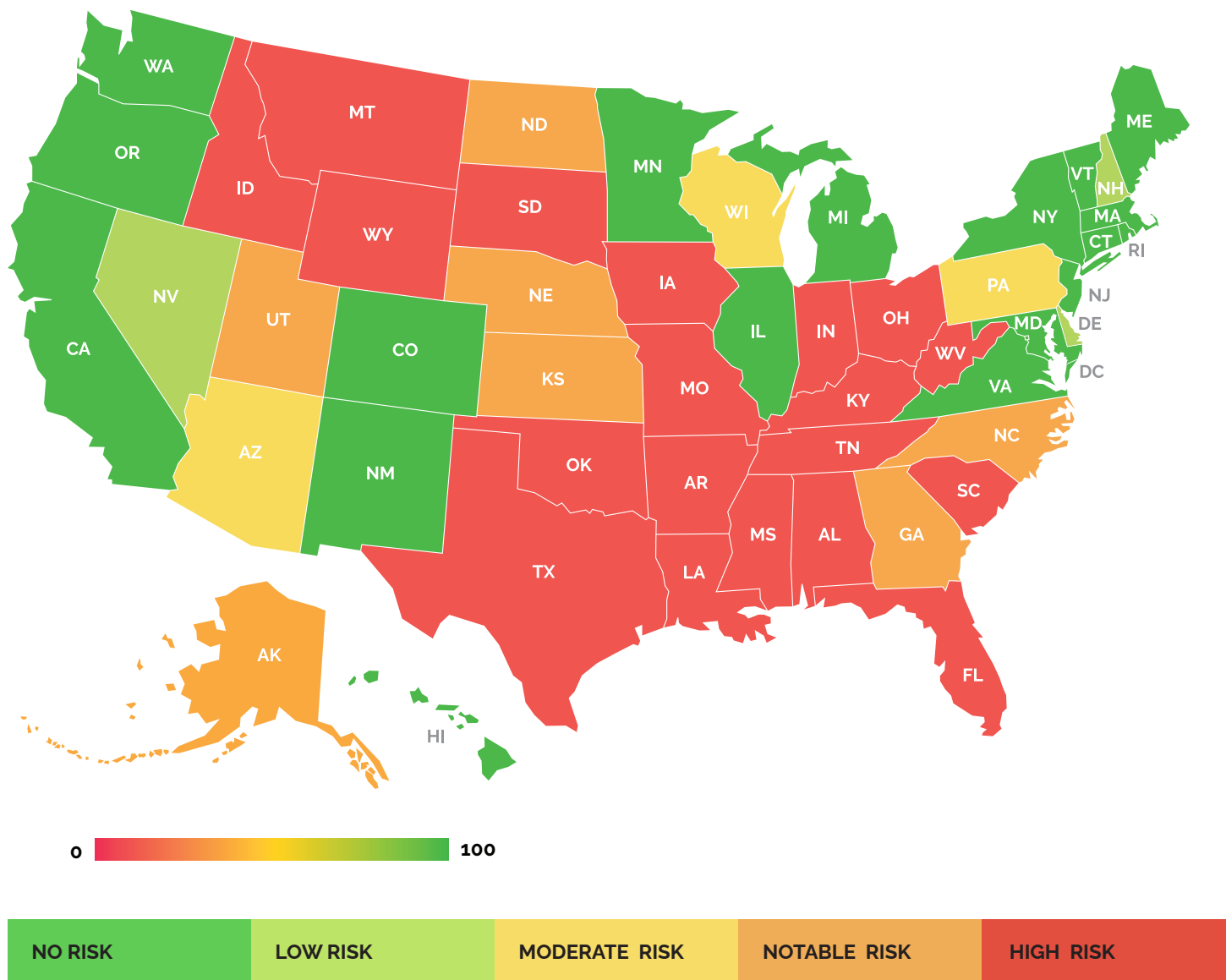
14.0<sub>/20</sub>

## A Note on Methodology

Download this report to learn how and why Out Leadership created the LGBTQ+ Business Climate Index for the 50 U.S. States, with important details about our methodology, including our data standards and practices. NOTE: \*HIV criminalization laws are discriminatory and ineffective. These laws fail to account for advances made in treating and controlling HIV, may deter people from getting tested and seeking treatment, and can exacerbate the stigma targeting people living with HIV and LGBTQ+ people.

# United States Heat Map

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.





# Rhode Island

## Talking Points

6.5% of Rhode Islanders identify as LGBTQ+. Conservatively, that's LGBTQ+ personal income of \$2.8 billion – it's a market my business can't afford to ignore.

Rhode Island is frequently referred to as one of the United States' most LGBTQ+-friendly states.

Rhode Island's comprehensive nondiscrimination law protects LGBTQ+ people, so the state is already experiencing the positive economic impacts of such policies. One estimate suggests that the state's economy may have grown 3%, or \$1.78 billion, thanks to its inclusive approach. That said, there's still a gap between policy and culture, and organizations in Rhode Island have a business imperative to ensure that LGBTQ+ people feel welcome in their workplaces.

Rhode Island has a favorable economic environment for business investment – but taking steps to make LGBTQ+ people feel safer and more included would better enable companies to attract top LGBTQ+ talent.

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

## Regional Context

# The Northeast

Out Leadership and FCB partnered on original market research into the attitudes of American workers on LGBTQ+ inclusion, which fielded in 2019 and 2020. These briefs as a whole will be updated on an ongoing basis by Out Leadership because we recognize the ever-changing nature of policy on the local, state, and national level.

The Northeast has the lowest percentage of those who are out at work (49.6%). LGBTQ+ workers in urban environments, however, do feel slightly more comfortable talking about their personal lives vs. urban LGBTQ+ workers for the rest of the country (17% more likely than nationwide). Workers in this region are more likely to hear or engage in negative conversations about LGBTQ+ people at work. Particularly for the non-LGBTQ+ group, which is 23% more likely to report observing or experiencing negative conversations about LGBTQ+ people vs the nation as a whole. Despite being more likely to hear negative conversations at work, workers in this region are the least likely to say that they hear this negativity from state leadership. They are 61% less likely to report that leadership in their state talks about LGBTQ+ people in predominantly negative terms. Like most regions, there is a strong difference between urban and rural audiences, especially for the self-rated importance of team diversity when looking for jobs. LGBTQ+ / Allies living in Rural areas care the least about diverse teams when looking for jobs (49% less likely than nationwide). Finally, audiences in the Northeast were 20% more likely to list "Supporting LGBTQ+ Pride celebrations" as one of their top three ways businesses can demonstrate their support for the community.

*Unless otherwise noted, all comparisons for more or less likely are compared to the National results. Regional results are based off of 1,500 respondents (LGBTQ+ and Non-LGBTQ+ responses have been weighted to be age-representative for each audience in each region). National results are based off of 600 respondents representative of each audience (LGBTQ+ vs Non-LGBTQ+).*

States in the Northeast region included: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont.

# Rhode Island: Impact of LGBTQ+ Discrimination on Business Talent

**1**

NO RISK

**2**

LOW RISK

**3**

MODERATE RISK

**4**

NOTABLE RISK

**5**

HIGH RISK

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## Brand Risk

**1**

NO RISK

Companies incur no brand risk by doing business in Rhode Island, which has comprehensive laws protecting LGBTQ+ people and a correspondingly great reputation.

## Client Risk

**1**

NO RISK

There's no reason to believe that LGBTQ+ or strong ally clients would pull business from companies operating in Rhode Island.

## Talent Risk

**1**

NO RISK

Rhode Island has comprehensive nondiscrimination laws and protections, making it a state top LGBTQ+ talent would prioritize.

## Marketing Risk

**1**

NO RISK

There is no risk to marketing to Rhode Island's LGBTQ+ community.

## Future Risk

**1**

NO RISK

The state has comprehensive nondiscrimination protections in place and there seems to be no appetite to pursue discriminatory legislation. We see no risk of a negative event.





# Current Legal Status of LGBTQ+ People in Rhode Island

## Legal status of the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Community

Rhode Island's laws protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, credit, and accommodations.

The state even protects against the perception of one's sexual orientation and gender identity, meaning a person could potentially seek recourse under the law even if they aren't a member of the group for which they are allegedly being persecuted.

The employment antidiscrimination law applies to all public employers, as well as private employers with four or more workers.

It's illegal to discriminate against children in Rhode Island on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation.

The state does not permit adoption agencies to decline prospective parents based on religious beliefs.

Rhode Island has had a religious exemption law since 1993. It bans the state from restricting a person's "free exercise of religion" unless the restriction is generally applicable and does not "intentionally discriminate against religion, or among religions," and the governmental authority proves that the restriction is "essential" to further a compelling governmental interest and is using the least restrictive means of furthering that interest.

Exposure to HIV is not explicitly criminalized in Rhode Island. However, there is a misdemeanor offense for sexually transmitted diseases on the books. The statute



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specifically prohibits anyone from knowingly exposing another person to the disease. Violations include a \$100 fine or a three-month prison sentence.

There are hate crimes protections covering sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, but the enhanced sentencing that hate crimes carry doesn't extend to the latter.

Rhode Island banned conversion therapy for minors by licensed professionals in 2017. It's not illegal to conduct conversion therapy in an unlicensed situation, but it isn't eligible for insurance reimbursement or coverage.

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## Legal Status of the Transgender Community

Applicants can change the gender markers on a birth certificate if they have undergone gender affirmation "based on contemporary clinical standards." The updated certificate will state that it has been amended but won't specify what changed. A nonbinary option is available.

Updating the gender marker on a driver's license simply requires surrendering the current license and completing a form for a new one. There has been a nonbinary option available since June 2020.

Name changes on a driver's license require that applicants get a name-change order from a court, update their social security records, and then wait 24 hours before updating other documentation.

Medicaid covers transgender healthcare in Rhode Island, including mental health treatment, hormone therapy and sexual confirmation surgery.

Insurance denials based on gender identity, expression or dysphoria is considered sex discrimination and is banned under state law.

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## Government Statements and Actions

In 2021, Rhode Island passed two LGBTQ+ bills into law. The first bill (2021-H 5741, 2021-S 0755) makes single-user restrooms in public places non-gender specific.

The second bill (2021-H 6215, 2021-S 0563) updates the definition of sexual orientation in regard to fair housing practices and eliminates an exemption that allowed discrimination based on gender identity or expression in owner-occupied buildings of three units or less.

In July 2018, former Gov. Gina Raimondo signed a law mandating that death certificates reflect people's gender identity.

The state's public health department has a Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Equity Group devoted to improving public health policies and outcomes for LGBTQ+ Rhode Islanders.

The ACLU is currently tracking 4 anti-LGBTQ+ bills in Rhode Island.



# Socio-cultural Environment of LGBTQ+ People in Rhode Island

## Status of LGBTQ+ Organizing and Community

Rhode Island has had a pride event since 1976. It now draws about 100,000 people annually and is scheduled to be held in June 2025.

## Cultural Views of the LGBTQ+ Community

After the state's bishop tweeted against Pride Month, Rhode Island Pride, the Governor, and various Catholic clergy in the state condemned his comments.

The Rhode Island Foundation, which gives community grants in the state, has a 15-year-old initiative focused on awarding money to LGBTQ+ initiatives in the state. The Equity Action Fund gives out about \$50,000 a year.





# Partners

Our partnerships make our work possible. The first State LGBTQ+ Business Climate Index released in 2019 was funded by a grant from the Gill Foundation. The Index is based on data graciously shared by the Movement Advancement Project and the Williams Institute. Ropes & Gray is our pro bono legal partner for the CEO Business Briefs globally, and their research informs this Index. FCB partnered with us to conduct original market research into American attitudes toward LGBTQ+ workplace inclusion, informing the Regional Context section of the State CEO Briefs. America Competes supported the development of the scoring for the Risk Assessments, particularly for the Future Risk score.

