

National Institute for Reproductive Health: Midwest cities take steps to protect abortion access

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Chicago, Columbus, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Other Midwest Cities Take Steps to Protect Abortion Access, According to Reproductive Freedom Report

National Institute for Reproductive Health's Local Reproductive Freedom Index Analyzes Policies of 50 Major Cities, Offers Roadmap and Tools for Advocates and Policymakers

Facing Attacks from the Trump-Pence Administration and Many State Legislatures, Cities - Even in Hostile States - Step Up to Protect Reproductive Freedom

NEW YORK – The National Institute for Reproductive Health (NIRH) today released the second iteration of the Local Reproductive Freedom Index, a first-of-its-kind initiative launched in 2017 to evaluate the reproductive health, rights, and justice policies of U.S. cities representing every region of the country, including: **Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Indianapolis, Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; St. Louis, Missouri; and Omaha, Nebraska.** The report is a call to action outlining specific steps advocates and policymakers have taken to build stronger and healthier communities, and charts a course for cities to follow, especially as the White House and hostile state legislatures across the country continue to wage attacks on reproductive freedom.

Since taking office, the Trump-Pence administration has emboldened anti-abortion extremists, spurring a spate of state-level laws intended to eliminate abortion

access and eventually overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Meanwhile, the federal government has undermined the nation's long-trusted Title X family planning program, imposing severe limitations on access to comprehensive health care and sexual education. Amidst the continued onslaught against reproductive health care, many cities have recognized both their responsibility and abilities to advance reproductive freedom.

"Cities across the country have expanded their vision of what is possible and are demonstrating the power and importance of electing leaders who will use their levers of power to advance reproductive freedom," **said Andrea Miller, president of NIRH.** "From reducing barriers to abortion care to ending discriminatory insurance practices to advancing democracy, American cities are engaging in a national countermovement to protect and advance reproductive health, rights, and justice."

NIRH analyzed the policies of 50 cities along 34 policy indicators, awarding each city zero to five stars based on the policies the city has in place – including policies on paid family leave, comprehensive sexuality education, and access to abortion clinics. The report demonstrates that bright spots exist even in deep red states and charts a road map for other cities to follow suit. Just two years after NIRH released its inaugural Local Index, cities across the country have expanded the vision of what's possible and necessary to protect reproductive freedom at the local level.

According to The Local Reproductive Freedom Index, **Chicago** is both a national and regional leader, receiving four out of five stars for its strong record of protecting abortion access – including implementing protections for abortion clinics and providers while raising public awareness about access to care. Chicago also has significant policies in place for funding and coverage of reproductive health care, including abortion care, STD/STI testing and prevention, and funding to train reproductive health care providers. However, it should be noted that Cook County ended its funding of abortion care in 2019 in response to the passage of HB40, despite continued need.

Several cities in the Midwest are also proving that cities can take the lead, even within anti-choice states. **Columbus, Ohio** received three out of five stars for expanding a pilot program offering free menstrual hygiene products at recreation centers and homeless shelters, passing an ordinance making it illegal to deny someone care based on their immigration status, and adopting a resolution opposing the Trump administration's drastic changes to the Title X family planning program.

Cleveland, Ohio received two stars after doubling down on its commitment to young people through support for pregnant and parenting youth, reproductive care in school-based centers and funding for comprehensive sexuality education. **Detroit, Michigan** received two-and-a-half stars and has made a fiscal commitment to reproductive health through funding for contraception and municipal insurance coverage of abortion care.

And **Madison, Wisconsin**, which received three stars, is a standout in the region with anti-discrimination ordinances for housing and employment based on pregnancy, family status, or gender identity. On the country level, Dane County regulates anti-abortion pregnancy centers by requiring all funding for reproductive health care go to entities that provide comprehensive, non-directive reproductive health care information.

Other cities in the Midwest evaluated by the Index include **Minneapolis, Minnesota**, which received three stars; **St. Paul, Minnesota**, which received three stars; **St. Louis, Missouri**, which received two-and-a-half stars; **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**, which received two-and-a-half stars; **Indianapolis, Indiana**, which received two stars; and **Omaha, Nebraska**, which received one star.

Of the 50 U.S. cities analyzed in the Local Index, San Francisco was found to be best equipped to protect and advance reproductive freedom, followed closely by Chicago and New York; other national leaders include Boston, Los Angeles, Portland, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. A full breakdown of each city can be found [here](#).

“We know that radical progress starts at the local level – and now is the time for cities to do everything they can to protect their residents against harmful actions by anti-abortion lawmakers in both state and federal government,” **Miller continued**. “Whether a city has not yet taken any steps to advance reproductive freedom, or if it’s one of the highest-scoring cities in the Local Index, there is always more a city can do to improve the lives of its residents – and the 2019 Local Index charts the course for how to make that progress.”

“We are grateful to NIRH for conducting this analysis so we can better understand our landscape of reproductive freedom,” **said Sara Finger, Founder and Executive Director, Wisconsin Alliance for Women’s Health**. “The Local Index provides key information on how Madison and Milwaukee can step up and improve the lives of women and girls in our communities. We are committed to working with local leaders to put policies in place that will strengthen reproductive freedom

across Wisconsin.”

“NARAL Pro-Choice Missouri is proud of our efforts to advance reproductive freedom in St. Louis City and look forward to working with NIRH and coalition partners to continue to strengthen our community’s commitment to expanding and protect access to critical reproductive health care,” **said Mallory Schwarz, Executive Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Missouri.** “We are grateful to NIRH for conducting this analysis and for their leadership.”

“The Local Index is a great resource for advocates and local leaders to quickly and easily understand a variety of policies that support reproductive freedom,” **said Amira Adawe, Executive Director of The Beautywell Project.** “The Beautywell Project looks forward to using this report as a resource to support local leaders in Minneapolis and St. Paul interested in the intersections of environmental justice and reproductive health.”

“The Local Index provides useful direction on how our city can and should step up to strengthen reproductive freedom,” **said Chrissy France, Executive Director of Preterm.** “We are committed to working with local stakeholders and elected officials to put meaningful policies in place that make sure reproductive healthcare is safe and available. As the scorecard shows, while there’s been progress in Cleveland, we still have a long way to go and urgently need a safety ordinance to protect the city’s last abortion clinic. Patients deserve to access their healthcare safely. Residents deserve peace in their neighborhood.”

“We are grateful to NIRH for conducting this analysis so we can better understand our city’s landscape of reproductive freedom and how to improve the lives of our residents,” **said Kellie Copeland, Executive Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio.** “We are proud of our efforts to advance reproductive freedom in Central Ohio. As the scorecard shows, progress has been made in Columbus, but the biggest challenges originate at the state and federal level. The question remains, how can local elected officials, health care providers, advocates, administrators, and individuals all work to reverse the damage of governors who will sacrifice everyone’s ability to access care all in the name of a political agenda? We’re proud of Columbus City Council for their efforts thus far, and look forward to continuing that work with this new Local Index tool to help guide the way.”

“The Local Index provides key information on how cities in Minnesota are demonstrating their commitment to strengthening reproductive freedom, and is a

great resource for advocates and local leaders to quickly and easily understand a variety of policies that support reproductive freedom,” said **Erin Maye Quade, Advocacy Director, Gender Justice.**

Since 2008, NIRH has provided more than five million dollars in funding and millions more in strategic and technical support for state- and local-level advocacy to 175 organizations in 43 states, including 64 localities and the District of Columbia.