



News Release
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Press Release

First ever state-by-state ranking of religious liberty unveiled

First of its kind index measures status of state religious liberty laws

Washington, D.C. — The Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy (CRCDC), an initiative of First Liberty Institute, today published the first annual Religious Liberty in the States report which includes an index reflecting free-exercise protections at the state level.

The data for this first year of the project are based on 11 legal “safeguards” of religious liberty. Once aggregated, they produce one index score per state, suitable for ranking states and, in time, tracking changes. At the index website (religiouslibertyinthestates.com) a separate downloadable scorecard is available for each state for those who are curious about individual states or who wish to communicate more effectively with their elected officials.

“The RLS index makes a significant and unique contribution to the field in a way that is rigorous, thorough, and thoughtful,” said Kelly Shackelford, President, CEO, and Chief Counsel to First Liberty Institute. “We are proud of this project and thankful for the hard work that has made it possible.”

“Not only do we construct an index that gives each state a single score and a place in our ranking, making interstate comparisons straightforward, we also have compiled a dataset like nothing else that is out there,” said Sarah M. Estelle, director of the CRCDC’s Religious Liberty in the States project.

The index revealed some surprising results. There are both red and blue states at the top and bottom of the rankings. “Red” Mississippi ranked first, followed closely by “blue” Illinois. Texas, known as a conservative state, ranked in the middle at 25th. While a few of the bluest states rank in the bottom three California (48th) and New York (50th), other blue states such as Washington (5th), Maryland (8th), Connecticut (11th), and Maine (14th) scored in the top third.

“A great virtue of this Index is that it provides very clear and concrete opportunities for states to improve their protections of religious liberty,” said Jordan J. Ballor, director of research at CRCDC. “For every state there are examples from other states -- whether their neighbors or from different parts of the country -- that can be adapted and used to address gaps in their safeguards of free exercise.”

The index measures the presence or lack of safeguards including conscience protections for health-care workers, opportunities for absentee voting for religious reasons, the ability of



religious organizations to refuse participation in marriage and weddings that violate religious beliefs, and exemptions to childhood immunization requirements. The full list of safeguards is available in the report.

The Religious Liberty in the States launch event, including a panel discussion on the report, will be livestreamed on CRCD's [YouTube channel](#) today beginning at 11 a.m.

For media inquiries, please contact John Couretas at 616-813-8941 or MediaInquiries@crcd.net.

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About the Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy

The [Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy \(CRCD\)](#) supports the creation and promotion of high-quality scholarship at the intersection of religion, culture, and democracy. Our publications, programming, and resources affirm the importance of religion as a public good for strengthening social bonds and reinforcing foundational freedoms.

About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](#) is a non-profit public interest law firm and the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

About Religious Liberty in the States

[Religious Liberty in the States](#) is a project of the CRCD and parent organization First Liberty Institute (FLI). The RLS index is a measure of laws and constitutional safeguards for religious exercise in the fifty states, including a ranking of the states across twenty-nine items that contribute to eleven distinct safeguards.