



News Release

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Florida Leads the Nation in Religious Liberty Protections, Governor Ron DeSantis Announces

Legislative Action Drives Gains in 2025 State Rankings, Inactive States Including Illinois Fall

Washington, D.C. — Today, First Liberty Institute’s Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy (CRCD) revealed the results of its fourth annual *Religious Liberty in the States* (RLS) index, the only comprehensive comparison of how all 50 states protect religious liberty through law. The 2025 RLS was announced by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis at a press conference at New College in Sarasota, Florida, where he was joined by Kelly Shackelford, President, CEO, and Chief Counsel at First Liberty, and Dr. Mark David Hall, director of the Religious Liberty in the States project.

For the first time, Florida tops the national ranking, earning a score of 74.6%, followed closely by Montana (70.6%) and Illinois (68.8%). Florida and Montana have gained momentum through new conscience protections, religious exemptions, and updated statutory safeguards.

“Florida holds several #1 rankings, leading the nation in education, economy, and tourism—and now, Florida is #1 in religious liberty,” **said Governor Ron DeSantis**. “We’re grateful for this recognition from the First Liberty Institute, which has just named Florida the #1 state in the nation for protecting religious liberty. Religious liberty is critical to the foundation and function of America, and I am proud that Florida excels in protecting this right.”

“This year’s findings show clearly that states taking legislative action are pulling ahead,” **said Kelly Shackelford**. “Under the leadership of Governor DeSantis, Florida passed real laws that protect real people, and now the Sunshine State is the national leader in protecting religious liberty. It’s time for more states to follow Governor DeSantis’s example and adopt strong religious liberty laws.”

The 2025 index evaluates 47 distinct legal protections, grouped into 20 safeguards, that states can adopt to support religious freedom in daily life from education and health care to family law and religious practice. As with previous editions, the index tracks changes over time and ranks each state based on the percentage of possible safeguards it has adopted. Visit the index website (www.religiouslibertyinthestates.com) to see each state’s score, rank, and change over time. The website also has resources for individuals, researchers, and policy makers who are interested in how their state can improve.

“Each state is a laboratory for liberty,” **said Dr. Mark David Hall**, director of the Religious Liberty in the States project. “The most successful states are actively innovating to protect what America’s founders called ‘the sacred right of conscience.’ These legal safeguards help ensure that people of all faith can live according to their beliefs.”

“This year’s changes reflect a growing gap between states that are actively protecting religious liberty today and those relying on decades-old laws,” **added Dr. Paul D. Mueller**, associate director of the project. “With this index, citizens can encourage their elected officials to take action like Florida and Montana to ensure that their states don’t fall behind.”

The 2025 RLS index has expanded to 47 legal items across 20 safeguards, adding eight new protections. These include medical conscience rights, protections for counselors, financial non-discrimination based on religion, and laws safeguarding parental rights, student religious expression, and foster parent conscience rights.

RLS is committed to the highest standards of scholarly research. From its beginning, it has been committed to transparency and the best practices for social-scientific research. This has involved forming a well-qualified advisory council, rigorous peer review, and adoption of robust research policies.

To view the complete rankings, download your state’s scorecard, or explore the methodology, visit: www.religiouslibertyinthestates.com

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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. To arrange an interview, contact John Manning at media@firstliberty.org or by calling 972-941-4453.

About First Liberty’s Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy

[First Liberty Institute’s 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 Religious Liberty in the States

[Religious Liberty in the States \(RLS\)](#) is a project of the CRCD and parent organization FLI. RLS is a comprehensive, peer reviewed annual measure of laws and constitutional safeguards for religious exercise in the 50 states.