



Religious Liberty in the States

# Executive Summary

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2023





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# Foreword:

## Tracking Religious Liberty Over Time

In this second year of the Religious Liberty in the States (RLS) project, it is worth considering the significance of measuring state-level protections of religious exercise over time. A lot was accomplished in the inaugural RLS 2022 project, which was the first ever index of such domestic safeguards. Year two represents a noteworthy development of the project, as new safeguards have been identified and changes in law are now, in another first, tracked over time. The first two years establish a solid foundation for a project that will only continue to grow in importance and depth from year to year.

The first installment of the RLS project created the framework for everything that follows in subsequent years. Beyond simply creating a robust and adaptive approach, RLS 2022 implemented the methodology to create a novel dataset and an index ranking. Thus RLS 2022 did not merely engage in a theoretical exercise or sample a few states or safeguards, but rather produced a concrete and complete index of all fifty states across eleven safeguards, comprised of twenty-nine items. At the time of the launch of the inaugural index in the fall of 2022, this was a remarkable achievement, and it is one that only becomes more appreciable over time. The act of invention, moving from nothing to something, is of a qualitatively different character than the work of innovation, adapting something that already exists in some new way. The 2022 index was just such an act of invention, the creation of something that previously did not exist.

In the project's first year, Dr. Sarah Estelle developed a methodology to identify provisions in constitutional and statutory law—and in a few exceptional cases, regulatory and administrative law as well—that provide protections for religious exercise and evaluate the presence or absence of these provisions such that they can be coded and then scored in a binary system. In addition to such methodological invention, under Dr. Estelle's direction the project saw the production of a new dataset arising out of that methodology. The resulting dataset is the first of its kind: a comprehensive listing and evaluation of twenty-nine different items and their location in law across all fifty states. The existence of the dataset alone represents a significant step forward for research on religious liberty legislation in the United States and has already proven to be an extremely valuable resource for policymakers, advocates, and researchers on current religious liberty provisions.

After the development of the methodology, it was applied to the existing body of law across the states, resulting in a ranking of the fifty states according to the safeguards that were identified in the research process. The 2022 index was the consummation of these complex processes and efforts, and the results were notable and newsworthy. Two states, Mississippi and Illinois, scored above 80 percent on the index, leading the other forty-eight states by a significant margin. California, West Virginia, and New York were on the other end of the rankings, each with a score below 20 percent. Although some of these results may have been unexpected, one important lesson from 2022 was that there were tangible opportunities for every state in America to improve religious liberty protections, regardless of where a state ranked on the index.

The 2023 index builds on this impressive beginning by expanding the scope of the project and adding additional elements that provide even greater assurance of the integrity of the project's conclusions, rankings, and underlying data. In the introduction of the 2022 report, "Sketching the Legal Landscape of Religious Liberty in the States in 2022," I likened the RLS project to a kind of artistic rendering of the broader reality of religious liberty. Looking at the laws at the state level is akin to an artist sketching the geographical foundations of a landscape—mountains, hills, valleys, and the like. Where the first index covered twenty-nine items across eleven safeguards, the 2023 index broadens the landscape. This year's index adds three new safeguards, bringing the total to fourteen—a substantive extension of the project's robust coverage into previously unidentified areas.

Over time, then, the RLS project will continue to increase its scope so that more of the legal landscape is included, thereby providing a greater sweep of the vistas of religious liberty provisions. The project also continues to track the existence of these specific identified protections over time, as in some cases they appear in a state for the first time or in other cases disappear. The larger federal context also will continue to provide a baseline environment. Changes in the federal context could either create new opportunities for positive state action to provide legal safeguards for religious liberty or eliminate the viability of state-level protections that have existed historically.

The changes in the results of this year's index are due to two factors: what states have done differently since the last index and how the index has expanded in scope. In all cases, the cutoff date for laws to be included in each installment of the index is December 31 of the previous calendar year. So the 2022 index considered laws as of December 31, 2021, while the 2023 index covers the laws up to December 31, 2022. Going forward, each annual installment will cover the changes made during the previous calendar year.

For RLS 2023, even one year (a short period of time relative to the pace of action in state legislatures) has seen a few changes in the laws concerning the items covered in the 2022 report. The few states that have modified their protections have had their scores changed from year one to year two. The more significant source of variation in the rankings from 2022 to 2023, however, is due to the addition of new items that are included for the first time in the calculations in the second year's index. The addition of three new safeguards, comprised of five items, brings the total number of safeguards in the 2023 index to fourteen, made up of thirty-four distinct items.

This means that there have been some significant shifts in the scores and resulting rankings of states from year one to year two. To be sure, much of this change results from the expansion of what the index itself measures rather than changes through time in the underlying data itself. The state laws themselves have not seen much change from 2022 to 2023. The RLS project will continue to track religious liberty protections in state law annually, however, which over time will allow more opportunity to continue to expand the coverage of legal provisions included in the project and to identify changes in the laws themselves. When combined, these annual



snapshots will provide a moving picture of the development of state-level legal protections for religious liberty. In this way the dataset will continue to expand as each year provides new data points for the stability or variability of religious liberty protections over time.

Although a single year is insufficient time to expect much in terms of effective legislative action, it is plausible, if not probable, that over time the RLS project will have a positive impact on the scores of states. With the creation and continuation of RLS each state has increased access to information about what other states have done to protect religious liberty. This information represents an opportunity for states to use the work of their peers to adapt and adopt provisions that make sense in their own contexts.

Even though the RLS project is itself a social-scientific endeavor aimed as much as possible at description rather than normative prescription, it is our hope that an increased awareness of the actual situation regarding religious liberty in the United States will spur legislators, other political leaders, and citizens to action. Whatever states do either to expand or contract religious liberty protections will be tracked by the RLS project, but it is our hope that scores will increase over time even as new areas of potential and actual action by states are identified. The increase of a state's score due to improvement in the substantive legal protection for religious exercise in that state is as much something to be welcomed as the decline of such protection is something to be grieved.

And so even as we might hope for increases in the protections for religious liberty in the states, both in terms of the number and scope of identified protections, RLS will continue to track domestic religious liberty protections over time, filling out the sketch of the legal landscape of religious liberty.

**Jordan J. Ballor**

Director of Research  
Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy

# Religious Liberty in the States 2023

**R**eligious Liberty in the States (RLS) is a data project and index measure reflecting the current landscape of free-exercise protections at the state level. Now in its second annual edition, RLS constructs a dataset for all fifty states on a newly expanded set of fourteen safeguards. Aggregating fourteen safeguard scores produces one RLS index score per state. That score can be interpreted as the percent of feasible safeguards, as defined by a state's peers (other states), codified by that state in statutory law. The index is suitable for ranking states and, if used with care, considering changes in religious liberty protections over time. Source data, including hyperlinked citations to specific state statutes, are published online at [religiouslibertyinthestates.com](https://religiouslibertyinthestates.com). These data are conducive to a number of interstate comparisons beyond the overall ranking, which are useful for state legislators who want their state's score to improve and for researchers who wish to understand the conditions for and consequences of religious liberty.

Objectivity, and the transparency that allows RLS users to test it, has guided RLS from the start. One practical implication of this for the index is that it does not reflect a predetermined list of religiously significant topics but rather allows states to indicate where their laws are relevant for religious people. If one state grants an exemption or makes an accommodation for religious reasons, in light of sincerely held religious belief, or based on conscience, we identify a potential safeguard and turn to the remaining states to determine whether they have implemented the same safeguard. The RLS website and the full 2022 report available for download there describe in greater details the careful methodology at the core of this project as it was designed in 2022 and has continued in 2023. Put briefly, RLS aims to employ the best practices of objective, quantitative measurement, but not only for scholarly credibility. RLS is motivated by an ethos of positive pluralism such that even the most technical elements of this project reflect a value for liberty for all people regardless of their religious commitments.

## What's New in RLS 2023

While this ethos and the well-defined methodology have not changed from our first year, RLS 2023 has expanded in scope—and value—in three ways.

First, RLS 2023 measures the presence or lack of each of fourteen safeguards in each state, which is an increase from the original eleven safeguards in RLS 2022.<sup>1</sup> One constraint on what RLS can include is our ability to confidently locate all the relevant state laws across fifty different states, each with markedly different ways of organizing and publishing their respective statutes. With the benefit of another year's time and insights from scholars and interested citizens, this year RLS identified three new safeguards of free exercise. All fourteen safeguards are listed below, with asterisks indicating those that are new this year.

### 2023 Safeguards (\* new this year)

1. Absentee Voting
2. Health-Care Provision—General Conscience
3. Health-Care Provision—Abortion Refusal
4. Health-Care Provision—Sterilization Refusal

5. Health-Care Provision—Contraception Refusal
6. Health Insurance Contraceptive Mandate
7. Marriage & Weddings—Religious Entity Refusal
8. Marriage & Weddings—Public Official Recusal
9. Marriage & Weddings—For-Profit Business Nonparticipation
10. \*Religious Ceremonial Life—Clergy as Mandatory Reporters
11. \*Religious Ceremonial Life—Ceremonial Use of Alcohol by Minors
12. Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)
13. School-Aged Children—Childhood Immunization Requirements
14. \*School-Aged Children—Excused Absences for Religious Reasons

RLS has approached religious liberty from the perspective that people of any faith or no faith should be allowed to live in *all* areas of their lives according to their sincere beliefs. For that reason, we have not limited our analyses to activities that typically occur within houses of worship or activities of the clerical professions; we have defined religious exercise broadly. And while in 2022 it was not our intention to focus on any particular areas of life—rather, in our first project year we aimed to characterize the laws in areas where they were most clear—we note that in 2023 the new safeguards are noticeably more closely tied to religious ceremony or observance, narrowly understood. RLS continues to explore new items for future years and welcomes feedback from interested parties. We are pursuing other leads, constrained only by the legibility of state laws and the complexity of the federal context that envelops them. Please contact us at [rls@crd.net](mailto:rls@crd.net) with new ideas for our ongoing project.

Second, we enriched our methodology in 2023 with an added step known to legal scholars and practitioners as “updating.” Through a systematic process of reviewing relevant case law, we consider the influence of judicial decisions on all the statutes cited in RLS data to determine whether the statutory law is still “good” law, neither deemed unconstitutional nor otherwise superseded by a decision of a court. A thorough updating process for RLS resulted in only three modifications to the codes and scores in our data—that is, only three states on one item, resulting in adjustments on less than 0.2 percent of our dataset. Still, we are committed to the updating process going forward because it enhances the credibility of both our source data for researchers and the aggregate scores and resultant rankings we report annually, even where adjustment to the data are unnecessary.

Third, in our forthcoming academic report, there is new and expanded content based on recent changes in federal law that have affected the context within which states operate with respect to religious liberty. The *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) decision of the US Supreme Court and the Respect for Marriage Act signed into law by President Biden in 2022 both raise questions about the opportunity for states to enhance religious liberty protections in the areas of health-care provision and marriage, respectively.

<sup>1</sup>Sarah M. Estelle, *Religious Liberty in the States 2022* (Plano, TX: Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.54669/DRYP4816>; Sarah M. Estelle, *Religious Liberty in the States 2022 Dataset* (Plano, TX: Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.54669/GJSE4026>.

Table 1: 2023 State Ranking, Scores, and Data Summary (by Group of Safeguards)

States	Rank	Score* (%)	Absentee Voting (Yes?)	Health-Care Provision (of 20)	Health Insurance Mandate (Yes?)	Marriage & Weddings (of 5)	Religious Ceremonial Life (of 3)	RFRA (Yes?)	School- Aged Children (of 3)
Illinois	1	85%	✓	19	✓	3	3	✓	3
South Carolina	2	67%		19	✓	0	3	✓	2
New Mexico	3	66%	✓	12	✓	0	3	✓	2
Mississippi	4	64%		20	✓	5	0	✓	0
Ohio	4	64%	✓	20	✓	0	3		1
Washington	6	62%	✓	8	✓	2	3		3
Arkansas	7	61%		20	✓	0	2	✓	1
Florida	8	60%	✓	9	✓	3	1	✓	3
Maryland	9	57%	✓	10	✓	3	3		2
Pennsylvania	10	55%	✓	8	✓	0	2	✓	3
Utah	11	55%	✓	5	✓	4	3		1
Tennessee	12	51%	✓	10	✓	0	2	✓	2
Delaware	13	50%	✓	6	✓	2	3		2
Kansas	14	49%	✓	9	✓	0	2	✓	1
Rhode Island	15	48%	✓	5	✓	3	2	✓	1
Hawaii	16	48%	✓	5		3	3		3
Arizona	17	47%	✓	4	✓	0	3	✓	1
North Dakota	17	47%	✓	4	✓	0	3		3
Idaho	19	47%	✓	10	✓	0	1	✓	1
Montana	20	46%	✓	9		0	3	✓	1
Maine	21	45%	✓	13	✓	3	1		1
Alabama	22	45%		9	✓	0	1	✓	1
South Dakota	23	44%	✓	5	✓	0	2	✓	1
Minnesota	24	43%	✓	4	✓	3	1		2
Georgia	25	42%	✓	9		0	3		2
Wisconsin	25	42%	✓	9		0	2		3
Louisiana	27	42%		6	✓	0	2	✓	2
Missouri	27	42%	✓	6	✓	0	1	✓	1
Connecticut	29	41%	✓	2	✓	3	2	✓	1
Oklahoma	30	41%	✓	3	✓	1	2	✓	1
Massachusetts	31	41%	✓	11	✓	0	1		1
Nevada	32	40%	✓	3	✓	2	2		1
Iowa	33	40%	✓	4		0	3		3
Oregon	33	40%	✓	4		0	3		3
North Carolina	35	37%	✓	5		1	2		2
Virginia	35	37%	✓	5		0	1	✓	2
New Jersey	37	36%	✓	10		0	2		2
Indiana	38	35%	✓	3	✓	0	1	✓	1
Kentucky	39	35%		6	✓	0	1	✓	1
Michigan	40	35%	✓	6		0	2		2
Colorado	41	35%	✓	8		0	2		1
Texas	42	34%		2	✓	3	0	✓	2
Wyoming	43	34%	✓	5	✓	0	2		1
Nebraska	44	34%	✓	5	✓	0	2		1
Alaska	45	33%	✓	4	✓	0	1		1
New York	46	27%		5		3	1		2
Vermont	47	26%	✓	0		2	1		1
California	48	26%	✓	4		2	1		1
New Hampshire	49	21%	✓	0		3	0		1
West Virginia	50	14%		6	✓	0	0		0

\*RLS 2023 utilizes the same index construction strategy to generate these scores as in 2022 but with a larger scope of laws. It is important to note that, as before, groups of safeguards—that is, the contents of the seven rightmost columns of this table—are not weighted equally. Instead, the fourteen individual safeguards are given equal weight.

## Overview of Results

Table 1 presents the fifty states, sorted by rank, with their RLS 2023 scores and a summary of the safeguards that comprise each state's aggregate score. Scanning this table or figure 1 below illuminates a number of broad observations about state-level provisions for the free exercise of religion as of December 31, 2022—that is, going into RLS project year 2023.

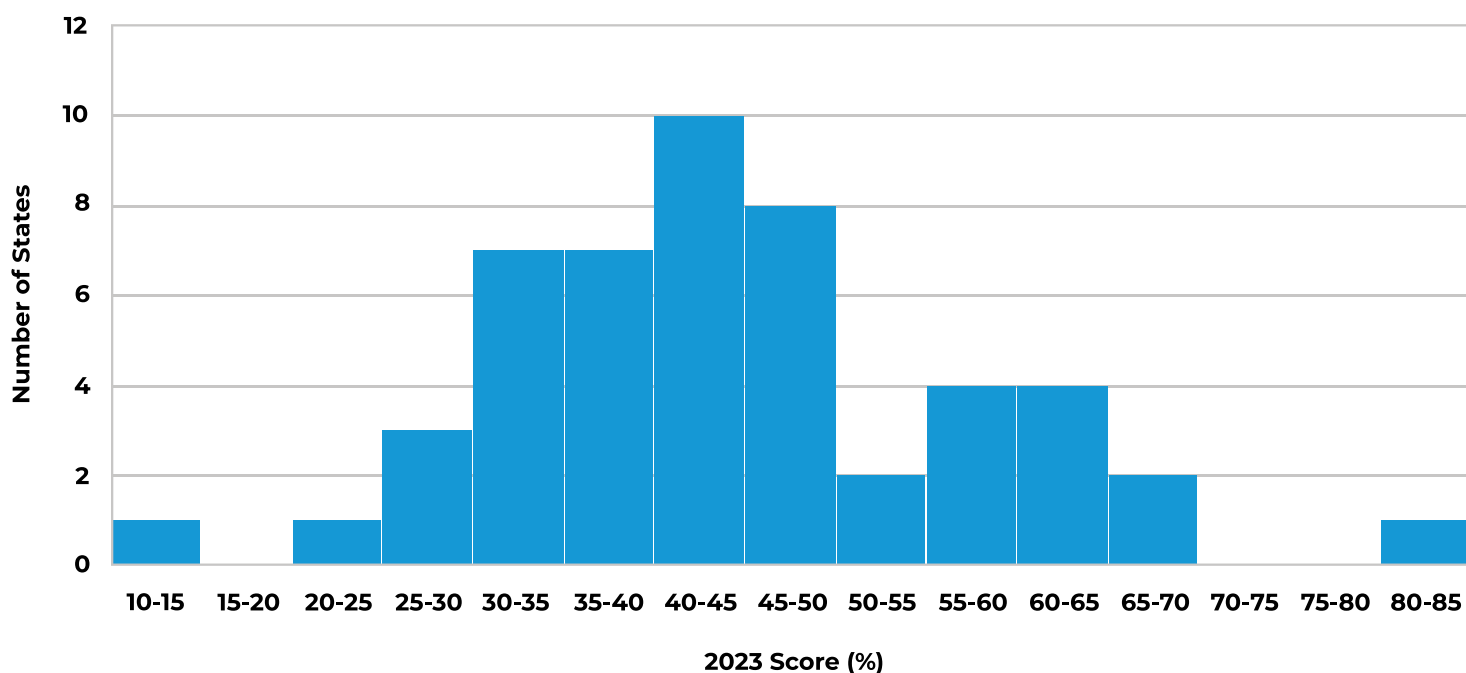
- **States differ greatly.** The highest score of 85 percent is more than six times higher than the lowest score of 14 percent. That front-runner with 85 percent, Illinois, is 18 percentage points higher than the second state, South Carolina, at 67 percent. That is, Illinois safeguards 25 percent more for its residents than does its nearest peer. West Virginia, the state in the fiftieth position in RLS 2023, is also an outlier on the safeguards measured this year. With only 14 percent of the feasible safeguards (as defined by its peers), it is 7 percentage points behind the forty-ninth state, providing one-third fewer safeguards than New Hampshire.
- **Every state has room for improvement.** Even Illinois is missing the equivalent of two full safeguards from the set of fourteen possible in RLS 2023. Moreover, because of RLS, each state can see clearly what the potential for expanded safeguards looks like by examining its own deficiencies and turning to peer states as examples, not only of what, but of how those safeguards can be implemented.
- **The majority of states are doing less than half of what they could be doing.** Especially noticeable in the distribution of states across the range of observed scores (as shown in figure 1) is that the vast majority of states grant less than half of the potential safeguards.

How do 2023's results compare to 2022's? All of the previous qualitative statements could be made about the states as measured in RLS 2022 (significant variation across states, room for improvement for every state, and—on average—inadequate safeguarding). However, looking at all fifty states together, a few things are different quantitatively in 2023. More states have scores above 50 percent than in 2022 (thirteen compared to nine) and average and median scores have increased. However, it is important to note that the items comprising the three new safeguards in RLS 2023 are, on average, more common across states than the 2022 items, which explains most of the apparent improvement from 2022 to 2023.

In fact, only three states made statutory changes to their laws in the original eleven safeguards of RLS 2022 in time for collection in RLS 2023's data. Two, South Carolina and Rhode Island, made improvements (to health-care conscience provisions and absentee voting, respectively). The third, Connecticut, regressed, eliminating the religious exemption from its childhood immunization requirement, with a statutory change that took full effect in the fall of 2022. There are indications, however, that state legislative action is increasing in our now fourteen safeguard areas. Statutory changes that are implemented by December 31, 2023, will be reflected in RLS 2024 data and index scores.

That the composition of RLS has changed between years presents a challenge to interpretation of scores across years, though not an insurmountable one. It simply means we must be clear about where we can make apples-to-apples comparisons and where, in reality, we are looking at apples and oranges. What can comparison across RLS 2022 and 2023 tell us precisely? This summary of RLS 2023 concludes with a more technical explanation of the kind of comparisons that can be made over years in the RLS data.

Figure 1: Distribution of States by RLS 2023 Score



## A Technical Note: Comparison over Time and Editions of RLS

As RLS grows—aiming to measure a fuller potential for safeguarding the free exercise of religion and to provide a richer set of data to interested citizens, legislators, and scholars alike—it is important for users to note the scope of what the index is combining in a given year. Consider any individual state. Its score on RLS 2023, relative to 2022, will reflect two (potential) sources of change: what the state did to its laws from year one to year two (especially on the original eleven safeguards from RLS 2022) and what RLS added to its scope in the form of new safeguards for 2023. Many users of RLS, understandably, will want to celebrate any increase in their state's score, which would indicate that the state in fact maintains a greater proportion of potential safeguards than previously reported. It is worth noting, though, that only a substantive change in a state's laws between years has practical implications for its residents. If, alternatively, a state's RLS score changes only because of the composition of what RLS measures, the new observations do not necessarily have any felt impact on residents in that state over time. Though different in their implications, both sources of change to a state's RLS score are meaningful. The differences, however, must be carefully understood when making comparisons within a state over years and when comparing those improvements (or declines) relative to other states over the same time period.

**Figure 2: Breaking Down the Overall Change in a State's RLS Score**

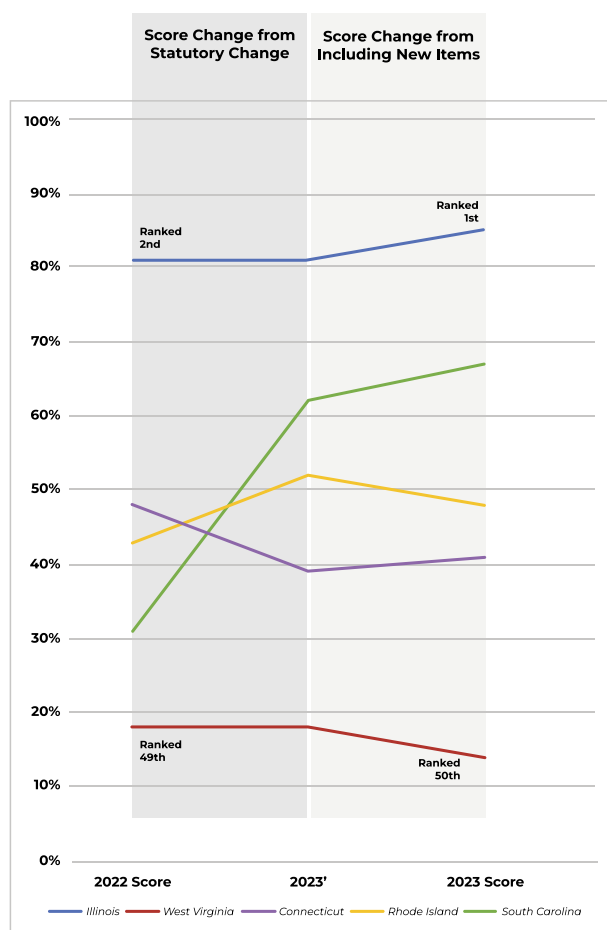


Figure 2 breaks down the overall change in five states' scores over the two years of RLS: 2023's number 1 and number 50 states, as well as the three states that made changes to their statutory laws. The horizontal axis labels "2022 Score" and "2023 Score" indicate that the vertical measures above them are the official, reported RLS scores in that year. The label "2023'" on that same axis indicates that the simulated scores plotted directly above are what the scores in 2023 would be had we not expanded the set of safeguards measured. Connecting all the points from left to right, then, forms something like trajectories where upward sloping lines can be interpreted as improvement and downward sloping lines as decline. However, only the first line segment for each of the five states illustrated above is an "apple-to-apple" comparison (since the safeguards are held constant). Still, RLS 2023 is a meaningful "orange" in that it provides more information on the circumstances of religious liberty in each state and across states.

Notice that Illinois's score increased, on net, by 4 percentage points from 2022 to 2023. That change combines the fact that Illinois made no improvements on the original eleven safeguards from RLS 2022 (indicated by a horizontal line segment at the start of the blue trajectory) but scored well on the three new safeguard areas. In fact, Illinois has in place in 2023 all five new component items that comprise RLS 2023's three new safeguards. An Illinoisan might understandably be proud to be number 1 on the aggregate RLS 2023 score, and certainly should be glad Illinois's score did not decrease, which would indicate a lack of the newly measured safeguards, but we should also be clear that none of the change in the overall score for Illinois was due to statutory changes.

Similarly, West Virginia made no changes to its existing laws in time for RLS 2023's most recent measurement (represented by a horizontal line segment at the start of the red trajectory). But its score moves opposite of Illinois's with the addition of the new safeguards in RLS 2023. West Virginia, in fact, has in place none of the five items comprising the three new statutory safeguards measured in RLS 2023.

We can contrast these simpler cases with the more complicated cases of the three states that made changes in 2022 that affected their RLS 2023 score. South Carolina (in green) and Rhode Island (in yellow) made statutory changes that improved their degree of safeguarding on the original eleven safeguards. In fact, South Carolina adopted a general conscience provision for health-care providers that improved its score greatly<sup>2</sup> (notice the steep slope of its first line segment) while also seeing improvements in its score due to the new items added to RLS in 2023 (the second line segment). Between RLS 2022 and 2023, Rhode Island no longer required excuses for absentee voting, newly offering an alternative to voting in the polling place for religious reasons (e.g., holidays) or no particular reason at all. This improved its score on the original eleven safeguards, but that improvement was moderated by the addition of new items in RLS 2023 (as indicated by the initial upward sloping line segment followed by the downward slope of the second line segment in yellow). In the end, Rhode Island still finishes with a higher score on RLS 2023 than RLS 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Implementing statutes protecting conscience for health-care providers of a broad array of health-care services is a quick way for a state to improve its RLS score. Not only will it satisfy RLS's requirements for that particular safeguard, but often these laws have practical spillovers, improving state scores on abortion, sterilization, and contraception refusal safeguards or even health insurance contraceptive mandates.

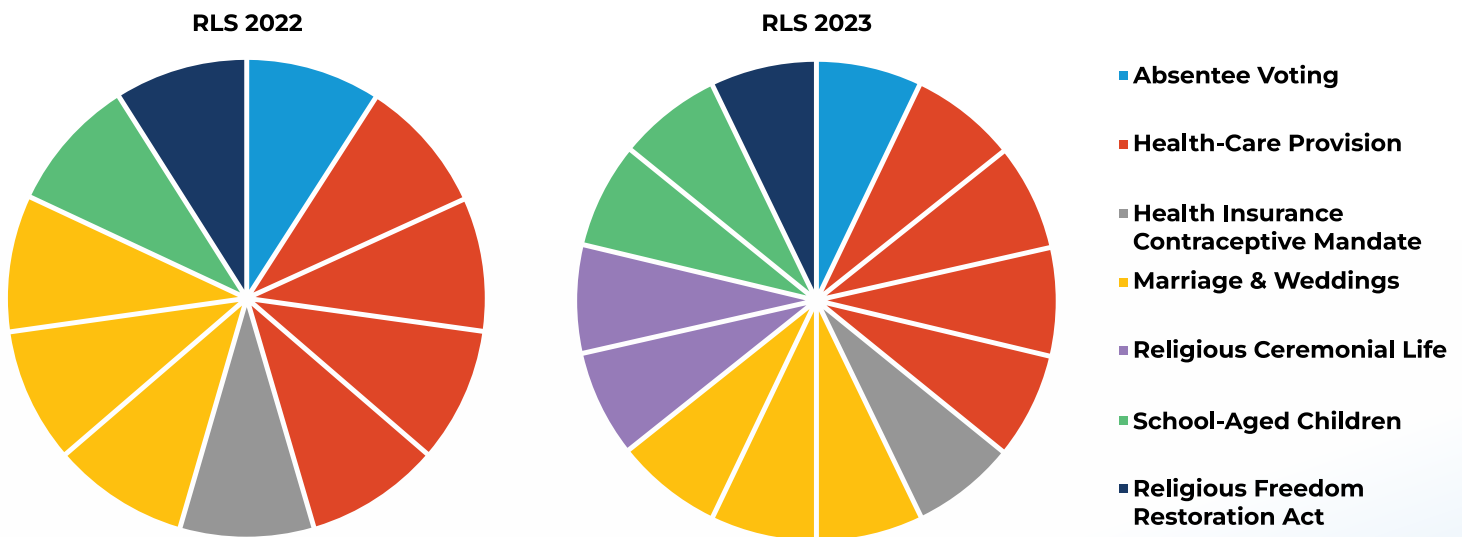


In the case of Connecticut (in purple), which eliminated the religious exemption for childhood immunizations, its score initially decreases (shown as a downward sloping portion at the start of its trajectory), but its performance on the five new items comprising three new safeguards moderates its descent (note the subsequent uptick in the final line segment), recovering some of its loss for the aggregate score reported for RLS 2023.

Finally, in making comparisons of a state's scores across time, one should note that, with an expanding scope, each of the original eleven safeguards now represents a smaller portion of the whole. All the safeguards are weighted equally, and RLS is measured on a scale of 0 to 100 percent so as to reflect the percent of feasible safeguards a state has in place. But now with fourteen safeguards in 2023, a single safeguard is one-fourteenth (approximately 7 percent) of the whole (potential) score rather than one-eleventh (about 9 percent) of the whole. Figure 3 features two pie charts, one for each RLS year, showing the weight of safeguards (represented each by a slice of the pie) and the resulting influence of six or seven topically related groups of safeguards (indicated by the different colors). The size of any piece of the pie indicates what percentage of the overall RLS score in 2022 or 2023 a safeguard comprises, again noting that safeguards are weighted equally for simplicity and transparency of our measure. The magnitude of a color in the pie shows the implications of that equal weighting on the influence of particular topics or issues within RLS analyses.

Comparing across pie charts in figure 3, starting at noon and working clockwise, one can see that absentee voting, health-care provision safeguards (of which there are four), the exemption for religious employers from contraceptive mandates, marriage and wedding safeguards (of which there are three), and RFRA all carry less weight in the overall total of RLS 2023 than in 2022. The only topical group that now carries more weight in RLS 2023 than 2022 is the one associated with school-aged children, which expanded in scope from only religious exemptions from the childhood immunization requirement to also include the requirement of public schools to grant excused absences for religious reasons. That is, the group is now comprised of two safeguards. Put differently, while childhood immunizations carry less weight in RLS 2023, more of RLS 2023 has to do with school-aged children than did 2022. The other new safeguards in RLS 2023 coalesce around religious ceremonies or sacraments. Since these safeguards were not present in RLS 2022, they had no weight. This topical group is comprised of two safeguards: (1) the exception clergy may receive from mandatory reporting laws when hearing confidential or penitential communication and (2) exemptions for minors' use of alcohol in religious ceremonies. Thus this group now comprises one-seventh of the aggregate score, since it is made up of two of fourteen total safeguards.

**Figure 3: Weighting Safeguards**



For more information on Religious Liberty in the States 2023, including state scorecards on all fourteen safeguards, details on how states establish their safeguards, and weblinks to the statutes cited by the RLS research team, please see our website [religiouslibertyinthestates.com](https://religiouslibertyinthestates.com). Further methodological explanations and answers to frequently asked questions are available online as well.

## About the Author

Sarah M. Estelle, PhD, is a professor of economics at Hope College in Holland, Michigan; research fellow of the Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy; and developer and author of the CRCDC's Religious Liberty in the States project. Dr. Estelle's other quantitative research includes applied microeconomic analyses of parenting investments, child academic achievement, adolescent risky behavior, higher education, welfare policy, and criminal justice reform. A second vein of Dr. Estelle's scholarship seeks to bring into conversation principles of traditional Christian teaching and classical liberal economics, including through projects relating economics and love. Dr. Estelle is the founding director of Hope College's Markets & Morality program, which invites students to explore economic issues through a Christian lens. She earned her PhD in economics from the University of Virginia.

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