

Report ranks Springfield low in gay equality

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A new report on gay and lesbian equality gives Kansas City and St. Louis perfect scores, but Springfield is far behind.

The report, issued by the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest gay rights organization, evaluated nearly 300 cities in the U.S., including five cities in Missouri.

Cities were rated using 47 criteria under broad categories such as nondiscrimination laws, relationship recognition, employment policies, law enforcement and municipal leadership on equality.

Springfield received zero points under nondiscrimination laws. This past year, at the behest of City Council, a task force has been studying whether Springfield should adopt a nondiscrimination ordinance.

The task force's report is expected to become public soon.

"Regardless of whether or not that ordinance exists, our community is very much engaged," Stephanie Perkins, deputy director of the Missouri gay advocacy group PROMO, said.

The city received high marks for city leadership's commitment to LGBT equality as well as its Human Rights Commission.

"The other points that we got were really for the work that city leadership does within the community, and I think that speaks a lot to Springfield," Perkins said.

Missouri State University sociology professor Tim Knapp said that city leaders deserve credit for bringing up the nondiscrimination issue for public debate last year.

"However, constituents are far from fully supportive, so elected officials are conflicted. I don't think that we'll make great progress on this score card until a nondiscriminaton law is passed," Knapp said in an email.

On average, Missouri cities scored 65 out of a possible 100 points. The average score nationwide was 57 points.

Kansas City and St. Louis each scored 100; Springfield scored 37 points. Columbia scored 74, and Jefferson City scored 12.