

# PUBLICATION

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## **Baker Donelson Demonstrates Commitment to LGBT Equality with Repeat of Perfect Score on HRC Equality Index**

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**The Human Rights Campaign is considered a leading national advocate for LGBTQ equality and its Corporate Equality Index is the national benchmarking tool on corporate policies and practices pertinent to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees. HRC recently released its 2017 Equality Index report and 517 major businesses – spanning nearly every industry and geography – earned a top score of 100 percent and the distinction of "Best Places to Work for LGBT Equality." For the second year in a row, Baker Donelson made that elite group of companies, demonstrating its ongoing commitment to LGBTQ equality in the workplace.**

"We are honored to achieve a perfect score on the Equality Index for a second year in a row," said Mark Baugh, chairman of the Firm's Diversity Committee. "It took incredible commitment from the management and our CEO Ben Adams to make this happen." Baugh noted that the Firm's LGBTQ employee resource group, Affinitas, made the HRC Index perfect score a goal several years ago and advocated for the changes necessary to achieve this recognition. "Along the way, by making the necessary changes to our policies and benefits, we became a better and more inclusive firm," said Baugh.

Of the 517 companies with perfect scores, Baker Donelson joined 112 other law firms, the most of any industry sector, suggesting that the legal profession is on the forefront of LGBT workplace equality. "These businesses know that LGBTQ equality isn't just the right thing to do, it makes them stronger in our global economy," said Chad Griffin, HRC President. "Ensuring fairness in the workplace is a value and increasingly a policy norm, and not just in the U.S. Now, more than 90 percent of Corporate Equality Index-rated businesses have embraced both sexual orientation and gender identity employment protections for their U.S. and global operations."

The HRC survey criteria reflect leading policies, benefits and practices for the LGBT workforce and their families. The criteria are premised on the notion of parity rather than prescription. In other words, HRC promotes the adoption of LGBT-specific language into existing corporate practices (e.g., ensuring that existing health care coverage affords coverage for routine and chronic care of transgender individuals as well as transition-related medical coverage). By using the HRC survey as a guide, businesses can ensure that their existing policy and benefits infrastructure is inclusive of the LGBT workforce and their families, resulting in greater recruitment and retention of a talented, diverse workforce. The voluntary survey rates companies based on these criteria:

- Equal opportunity (including sexual orientation and gender identity) employment and vendor policies;
- Equivalent employment benefits for same-sex spouses and partners (including transgender-inclusive health insurance);
- Organizational LGBT competence (e.g., LGBT employee group, diversity training, professional development for LGBT employees, option for LGBT employees to "self-identify");
- Public commitment to LGBT community (e.g., philanthropic activities, supplier diversity program, recruiting and marketing); and

- No large-scale official or public anti-LGBT blemish on the company's recent record. Note: No employer received this deduction in the 2017 HRC Survey.

These criteria are updated each year, as HRC adapts to changes in LGBT business mores, so that the HRC survey continues to represent the "gold standard" for LGBT-friendly and inclusive employment policies and procedures.

This 15th edition of the Corporate Equality Index saw the largest increase in top-rated businesses in the history of HRC's survey and the largest jump ever in businesses offering transgender-inclusive health care coverage – from 511 last year to 647 this year. This was welcome news in a year which saw an unprecedented wave of anti-LGBTQ bills spread across the country, from Mississippi to North Carolina. "Corporate champions state to state – from South Dakota and Mississippi, and North Carolina and Georgia – made their voices heard and stood firmly on the side of fairness and equality," said Griffin.

Despite the good news from the HRC survey, much work remains. "Today, marriage equality and hate crimes protections are the law of the land. Barriers to LGBTQ service in the armed forces have been lifted. But the lack of consistent, explicit federal protections in employment, housing, credit, public services and other essential aspects of American life remain major barriers to full equality for the LGBTQ community," said Griffin, who remains optimistic. "While there is much to do and many key civil rights fights ahead, thanks to these private sector leaders, the march towards greater equality is not slowing down." Baker Donelson is proud to be leading the march.



*Sam Felker represented Baker Donelson at the recent HRC Celebration for the 517 companies who scored a perfect 100 on the Equality Index 2017.*