

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ARE TAKING HOLD IN U.S. STATES, CITIES, AND TOWNS

New report by Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute details how state and local governments are using human rights to enhance local law and policy

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New York, NY (December 10, 2012) – Incorporating human rights into local policies and decision-making leads to effective, sustainable, and responsive policies, according to a new report released today by Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute.

Bringing Human Rights Home: How States and Local Governments Can Use Human Rights to Advance Local Policy offers a comprehensive review of human rights initiatives at the state and local level. The report details over a dozen ways that states, cities, and towns are integrating international human rights principles into local policy. Examples demonstrate how human rights are being used to foster equity, address discrimination, and respond to local concerns including health disparities, housing and domestic violence. As the level of government closest to the people, state and local agencies and officials play a key role in implementing human rights. The report emphasizes this and lays out concrete steps for integrating human rights into local law, policy, and practice.

Examples from the cities of San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Pittsburgh, Seattle, El Paso, Eugene, Baltimore, Madison, and Los Angeles are described in the report. At the state level, innovative initiatives from California, Vermont, and Connecticut are also included. The report highlights ways in which officials in these and other localities are raising awareness of human rights, reframing local concerns as human rights issues, fostering participatory governance, and conducting human rights audits and assessments.

Drawing from outreach and interviews with current and former government officials and staff, the report describes the multiple benefits of a human rights-based approach to policy. City staff from Eugene, Oregon, where city departments use a human rights assessment tool, emphasize that human rights have helped “to more effectively serve the needs of all the people of Eugene.” Human rights can also enhance transparency and accountability as demonstrated by an example from El Paso County, where the Sheriff's office is partnering with community members to address immigration enforcement and local crime.

“The initiatives emerging across the country demonstrate the breadth and flexibility of the human rights framework. They also underscore that human rights foster innovation and proactive policymaking, improving local governance,” said JoAnn Kamuf Ward, Associate Director of the Human Rights in the U.S. Project at Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute.

The report provides a framework for integrating human rights locally and lays out concrete recommendations for state and local governments. A first step is to build upon existing examples and integrate human rights in local policy and decision-making. Human rights initiatives should be developed and implemented in partnership with impacted communities to ensure they are sustainable and effective in addressing local needs. As noted by Mayor Ralph

Becker of Salt Lake City, “As a community it is our duty to constantly reaffirm our emphatic commitment to protecting fundamental human rights. We must be dedicated to strengthening our policy approach to promote social justice for all our residents. This process starts at the local level, where there are already many individuals working tirelessly to promote human rights here in our city.”

The report also underscores that federal resources and support are critical to the ability of state and local governments’ capacity to promote and protect human rights. Fulfilling the promise of human rights requires long-term planning, resources, and coordination at all levels of government. State and local officials and agencies have a pivotal role to play in these efforts.

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The report was published by **the Human Rights Institute at Columbia Law School, under the auspices of the Human Rights at Home (HuRAH) Campaign. The Human Rights Institute’s** Human Rights in the U.S. Project builds the capacity of domestic lawyers, policymakers and advocates to incorporate a human rights framework into social justice advocacy efforts. The **HuRAH Campaign** is coalition of national and local organizations seeking to build human rights into the way government operates, at the federal, state and local levels.