



Gender Equity Legislation in New York City is a Model for Local-Level Policy

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Local governance plays a pivotal role in the creation and implementation of policies aimed at addressing gender disparities throughout the United States. Especially now in 2025, with the numerous executive orders and policy statements seeking to undo the gender progress made over the past five decades, and essentially **eliminate gender identity**, in the federal government. Given recent federal attacks on gender equity, states and municipalities are now tasked with the responsibility – and opportunity – to address gender equity issues through both policy development and practical application. At the forefront of this shift is New York City, one of the largest and most **gender-progressive** municipalities in the nation. Demonstrating significant leadership through its Commission on Gender Equity (**CGE**), New York has proven to be a laboratory of democracy. The city's innovative and progressive approach offers a model that should be replicated in other municipalities, particularly those committed to safeguarding reproductive health, to effectively tackle gender disparities.

The Structure and Impact of New York City's Commission on Gender Equity

The **CGE** was established to identify and dismantle pervasive inequities and discrimination facing gender minorities including girls, women, transgender, and gender non-conforming persons by using a gender-based lens when assessing city agencies. The CGE also aims to provide guidance and make recommendations in order to eliminate gender-based inequalities within New York City. To assess how New York City is working toward this aim, the three commission goals of economic mobility, health and reproductive justice, and safety guide an analysis of 235 gender-related policies passed between 2014 and 2022 by the New York City Council..

Our **findings** demonstrate that gender policy in New York City may go beyond the traditional means of addressing gender equity at times, but overwhelmingly focuses on approaches that have historically dominated the gender policy agenda, especially those that are protective and paternalistic toward women. This is particularly epitomized by two legislative initiatives: *Expanding the Definition of Employer Under the Human Rights Law to Provide Protections for Domestic Workers* and *Clarifying the Protections for Part-time, Temporary, Leased and Seasonal Workers*. The most common policy focus within the three commission goals is sexual harassment and discrimination. From this **study**, avenues for progress center around including all genders and strengthening local-level policy and community relations.

Gender Equity in Municipalities Lessons Learned for Local-level Gender Policy

To advance gender equity across U.S. municipalities beyond New York City, policy should move beyond the pervasive historical issues and paternalistic approaches to include progressive, emerging, and shifting concerns and identities that impact those who do not fit traditional gender norms and categories. This approach fosters a more inclusive environment for everyone.

Exploring New York City's legislation has helped identify areas where policymakers can focus their efforts to continue to make progress toward gender equity. Areas for improvement may include:

1. **Non-majority SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression) Inclusion.** Although addressing sexual harassment and violence and providing general protections is important to all SOGIE groups, non-majority groups, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities, should be explicitly included within legislation. More explicitly inclusive policies would result in positive outcomes for individuals and greater health, economic, social, and political equity, more generally. For example, New York City demonstrated its progressiveness in implementing legislation that mentions how it will require **prisons** to have monitored and dedicated housing units for those who identify beyond the heteronormative gender binary. Additionally, certain policies have called for updating demographic **forms** for certain city agencies to include sexualities that go beyond heterosexual, including lesbian, gay, and bisexual/pansexual. Future policy can continue to expand beyond general protections by focusing on transitions in the workplace and facility usage based on one's gender identity.

2. **Local-level Policy Protections.** Oftentimes, underrepresented groups may find more safety legislation and protections from their local government. However, federal, state, and local policy disconnects may emerge. Therefore, a municipality's policy must offer maximum protection for all groups, especially where federal and state policy is either silent or discriminatory. Future policies should address topics such as state-issued identification cards, marriage recognition, and employment benefits on health and reproductive justice.

3. **Local-level Collaboration with Community-Based Organizations.** Collaborating with Community-Based Organizations, or Committees and Commissions specific to representing certain minority groups will bring insightful perspectives, resources, and solutions from those who have firsthand experience on topics of interest, in addition to creating and building connections and trust with the communities served. Therefore, a municipality's group of policymakers should form working relationships with community-based organizations to effectively target areas and topics within legislation in which equity for SOGIE communities may be lacking.

These approaches are just the first step in addressing how municipal policy can improve gender equity for all individuals. New York City is just one example of how policymakers can build on progressive policy to address gender disparities. As more municipalities experiment with novel policies, states and localities will have the power to redefine the landscape of gender rights, fostering a more inclusive and equitable future.