

DAYTON, OHIO

Human Rights Readiness Assessment

Department of Recreation • City of Dayton

Prepared by Dignity Index Global | May 2025

DIGNITY INDEX GLOBAL

About This Assessment

Dignity Index Global was commissioned to evaluate Dayton's readiness to become a Human Rights City — the first U.S. city to do so by ordinance.

1. Human Rights vs. Civil Rights: Understanding the Framework
2. Methodology: How the Assessment Was Conducted
3. Dayton in Context: History and Demographics
4. Key Findings: People, Policies, and Places
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6. Budget Allocation and Resource Priorities
7. Promising Practices
8. Recommendations: Immediate, Medium-Term, and Long-Term
9. Closing & Next Steps

Understanding the Framework:

Civil & Political Rights + Economic, Social & Cultural Rights
= Human Rights

Civil Rights vs. Human Rights

Civil Rights Framework

- Focuses on addressing discrimination & equal treatment under law
- Primarily reactive — a violation must occur before enforcement begins
- Enforced through litigation, agency complaints & compliance oversight
- Addresses specific protected characteristics (race, sex, disability...)
- Strong in U.S. law; well-established legal infrastructure

Human Rights Framework

- Affirmative — recognises rights to housing, healthcare, food, safe environments, education & economic security as foundational
- Primarily proactive — policies assessed to prevent harm before they occur
- Implemented through long-term planning, community participation, measurable indicators & public accountability
- Universal, indivisible, inalienable & interdependent by design
- Grounds Dayton's work in international human rights standards (UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR)

The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)

The UN-defined framework that underpins Human Rights Cities. Dayton's assessment uses HRBA with the PANEL principles, the Five A's, RPF, and the 3P framework.

P

Participation

Meaningful, inclusive engagement in decision-making

A

Accountability

Clear obligations; mechanisms to hold duty-bearers responsible

N

Non-Discrimination

Addressing all forms of discrimination based on identity

E

Empowerment

Building capacity of rights-holders to claim rights

L

Legality

Anchored in international human rights law & standards

Human rights are: Universal • Indivisible • Inalienable • Interdependent

Human Rights Cities: Global Models

Over 700 cities across five continents have declared themselves Human Rights Cities, integrating HRBA into governance, policymaking, and community engagement.

SCOTLAND

Progressive Realization

Public authorities must actively improve and fulfil human rights — not merely avoid violations. Pre-legislative processes certify that proposed bills advance human rights.

Cross-Sector Integration

Human rights principles embedded across land reform, environmental governance, health, social protection, and housing — not siloed.

Anchored in Law

Scotland's approach moves human rights from aspiration to legal obligation — a model for cities seeking genuine accountability.

AT VIENNA (2014–Present)

Human Rights Office (2015)

Coordinates human rights as a cross-cutting topic across ALL Vienna City Administration areas — from recreation and infrastructure to budgeting.

Innovative Mechanisms

Steering group with civil society, NGOs & political parties. Focus groups and round tables on housing, trafficking, asylum, LGBTIQ+ rights. Evidence-based action planning.

COVID-19 Resilience

Applied HRBA throughout the pandemic: coronavirus information in 24 languages, maintained local control over essential services. Now European Capital for Democracy 2024–2025.

Human Rights Cities in the United States

The U.S. movement is growing — and Dayton is poised to make history.

1993

**World Conference
on Human Rights**

Vienna — launches global Human Rights Cities initiative through PDHRE (People's Decade for Human Rights Education).

1998

**San Francisco,
California**

First U.S. city to adopt CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) as a governance framework.

2000s

**60+ Cities
& Counties**

Seattle, WA and Atlanta, GA adopt Human Rights City resolutions. Over 60 U.S. cities and counties pass ordinances on specific human rights treaties.

Now

**Human Rights
Cities Alliance**

A burgeoning national alliance is engaging more municipalities to embody human rights principles and contribute to an international framework.

Methodology

How the Assessment Was Conducted

SCOPE

- Department of Recreation as pilot case study
- Three dimensions: People · Policies · Places
- Field visits: April & June 2025
- 137,000 Dayton residents affected

WHO WE SPOKE WITH

- Mayor, City Commissioners, City Manager
- Directors: Recreation, Human Relations, Law, HR, Environment, Public Works, Civil Service
- Deputy City Managers,
- Chief of Police & Police recruitment orientation
- 40+ recreation centre beneficiaries & clients
- Management & field staff across all 3 centres

METHODS USED

- In-depth interviews with leadership, staff & residents
- Focus groups (phone & in-person)
- Physical site assessments of all 3 centres
- Review of city publications, websites & materials
- Desk research: municipal policies, international HR frameworks, promising practices
- Triangulation of qualitative & quantitative data

FRAMEWORKS APPLIED

- 3P Framework: People, Policies, Places
- HRBA PANEL Principles
- Five A's: Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, Adaptability, Affordability
- Respect–Protect–Fulfill obligations

PILLAR ONE — WHAT WE ASSESS

P

PEOPLE

Elected & appointed leadership, staff, and community members — who governs, who serves, who is heard

P

POLICIES

Laws, regulations, programs & procedures — the rules that govern how rights are realized or denied

P

PLACES

Physical, digital & public spaces — the built environment that enables or prevents access to rights



PILLAR TWO — HOW WE EVALUATE

RESPECT

Government must NOT take actions that violate, remove, or restrict rights residents already enjoy

PROTECT

Government must PREVENT third parties — contractors, private actors — from violating residents' rights

FULFILL

Government must take POSITIVE STEPS to create conditions, institutions & programs that enable rights to be fully realized

PILLAR THREE — HOW WE MEASURE ACCESS

THE FIVE A'S

A

Availability

Are there enough services & facilities to meet community needs?

A

Accessibility

Can all residents practically reach and use services?

A

Acceptability

Are services culturally appropriate and free from discrimination?

A

Adaptability

Do services respond to changing community needs and crises?

A

Affordability

Can all residents afford services, including hidden transport & childcare costs?

The 3Ps define what is assessed · RPF defines how government is evaluated · The Five A's define whether access is genuinely universal

Dayton in Context: History & Demographics

Who Lives in Dayton, Ohio

136,741

Total Population
(2023)

26.4%

Poverty Rate
(nearly 2x national avg.)

\$43,454

Median Household
Income (54% of US)

34.2 yrs

Median Age
(young city)

50%

White
Non-Hispanic

50%

People
Of
Color

50.51%

Women

White 25.2%
Women of color 25.3%

49.49%

Men

White 24.7%
Men of color 24.7%

6.3% Foreign-Born (≈8,500 residents) • 5.6% Hispanic / Latino • 27,000 identify as LGBTQ+

West Dayton census tracts: poverty rates 35–50% • 3rd most racially segregated metro in the US (Massey, 1988) • Immigrant population grew 25.9% (2014–2019)

Understanding these demographics is inseparable from Dayton's history of redlining and systematic disinvestment.

The Legacy of Redlining in Dayton

Dayton was declared 'unequivocally more segregated' in 1960 — and the impacts persist today.

Wealth Exclusion

White families gained federally backed mortgages & generational wealth. Black families were systematically denied homeownership.

Health Disparities

UC Berkeley research links redlining maps directly to higher asthma rates, lead exposure, and environmental toxins in Dayton today.

Disinvestment

Redlined neighbourhoods received decades of reduced infrastructure, parks, schools, and services.

Spatial Segregation

I-75 and I-35 mirror the 1935 redlining map. West Dayton continues to face higher poverty, lower property values, and limited recreation access.

Key Findings: People · Policies · Places

Dayton's Three Recreation Centres

Down from 8 centres. Three remain for 137,000 residents.

Greater Dayton Recreation Center (GDRC)

West Dayton — Predominantly Black, high-poverty community

50,000 sq ft · Gym, walking track, computer lab, multipurpose rooms · Dedicated senior space, no teen space

POOL CLOSED since 2020 (5+ years)

Lohrey Recreation Center

Southeast Dayton — Mixed-income, racially diverse

Belmont Pool · \$1.3M renovation planned for 2025 · Programming mainly for children & seniors — no teen programming

Pool OPEN — severely limited hours

Northwest Recreation Center

Northwest Dayton

Dabney Pool · Gym, pool, fitness facilities · Closed Wednesdays and Fridays

Pool OPEN — limited hours

The GDRC Pool Closure: A Human Rights Case Study

The Greater Dayton Recreation Center pool has been closed since 2020 — in the city's highest-poverty, predominantly Black neighbourhood.

RESPECT

Pool closure = rights regression. A 'lifeguard shortage' closed the West Dayton pool entirely while other neighbourhoods retained service (even on reduced hours). This constitutes discriminatory resource allocation.

PROTECT

West Dayton faces 10–15°F higher temperatures (lack of tree canopy), higher asthma rates, and older housing without AC. Closing the only pool removes a critical heat-relief resource with life-and-death consequences.

FULFILL

Progressive realization requires continuous improvement. Instead, West Dayton experienced regression — five years without access. Entire childhood cohorts (ages 3–18) lost formative years of aquatic access.

"By May 2023, Dayton recorded 898 juvenile arrests — an 86% increase over the same period in 2022. By year-end 2024, more than two dozen young people had been killed in youth gun violence."

HRBA Applied to the Pool Closure: Respect & Protect

A Human Rights-Based Approach to the GDRC pool closure would have required the following:

CURRENT REALITY:

Pool closed in 2020 — remained closed through June 2025. No compensation or remedy provided. No policy changes implemented. No meaningful community engagement in the reopening process.

RESPECT — What Should NOT Have Happened

- Pool should not have been closed without exhaustive assessment of alternatives
- Residents deserved advance notice, clear explanation, and definitive timeline
- West Dayton residents should never have been left without pool access while other neighbourhoods retained service
- Lifeguard recruitment pipelines should have been established years before shortages — with school & college partnerships
- Lifeguard compensation should have been raised to competitive levels to attract and retain staff
- If closure was unavoidable: free transport to other facilities should have been provided

PROTECT — Against 3rd-Party & Environmental Harm

- City should have monitored private pools to prevent discriminatory admission practices
- City should continue to monitor, assess and respond to divestment in West Dayton
- West Dayton's redlined neighbourhoods suffer 10–15°F higher temperatures, higher asthma rates, and older housing without AC
- Closing the only pool in this community removes a critical heat-relief resource — with life-and-death implications
- The principle of due diligence requires the city to take reasonable steps to prevent and remedy harm stemming from systematic disinvestment

HRBA Applied: What Should Happen Now — Fulfill

The FULFILL obligation demands positive action to realise rights — not just avoiding harm. Here is what is required:

Immediate Full Reopening

GDRC pool reopened with hours equivalent to other city facilities. Enhanced summer programming to address five years of unmet recreational needs.

Accountability Mechanisms

Quarterly public reporting on participation rates, user satisfaction, and identified barriers. Independent community oversight with authority to prevent future closures.

Restorative Programming

Free swimming lessons for all West Dayton youth who lost access during closure years. Formal acknowledgment of harm and community restoration process.

Structural Prevention

Mandatory equity impact analysis before any future facility closure. Regional cooperation agreements to share lifeguard resources across municipalities.

Youth Leadership

Youth advisory board with real decision-making authority over teen programming design. Hiring preference for recreation staff from West Dayton neighbourhoods.

The Five-Year Question

Cohorts of West Dayton children aged 3–18 were without a pool for 5 years. The 86% spike in juvenile arrests is not coincidental — it represents systematic failure to fulfil multiple interconnected rights.

What the Men Who Lived It Know

"The evidence here is not statistical. It is testimonial and it is unanimous.

One key element that is vital to recognize is that ALL men of color interviewed who had worked or currently work at the Department of Recreation mentioned that Dayton's recreation centers were a lifeline. Those who didn't grow up in Dayton recognized the importance of recreation centers and access to sports that transformed their lives.

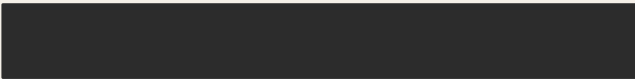
For men of color (the majority of those interviewed), access to recreation centers and sports has been inextricably linked to their survival and success in life. Therefore, the role that the Recreation Centers of Dayton continue to play even with resource restrictions, understaffing, and shortened hours remains a lifeline for youth and the community.

For Dayton to thrive, the Department of Recreation should be provided the means to succeed."

— DIG Dayton HRA Report, 2025

Budget Allocation: Where Dayton Invests

Current budget structures prioritise reactive over preventive approaches — with human rights consequences.

Police & Fire  ~60% (\$95M)

Recreation  <5% (\$7–8M)

Resource Allocation Ratio \approx 12 : 1 (Police : Recreation)

Cost of Pool Closure

Saved approx. \$125,000–\$188,000/year in lifeguard costs
= ~\$627K–\$940K over 5 years

Cost of Juvenile Justice

86% spike in juvenile arrests
= millions in detention, court costs, lost education & lifetime outcomes
(\$100K–\$148K per incarcerated youth)

Influence & Authority Beyond City Jurisdiction

Recreation departments frequently encounter issues shaped by actors beyond city authority — school districts, county agencies, healthcare institutions. Yet cities CAN shape outcomes.

Cities can influence outcomes through: Coordinated Leadership • Convening Power • Shared Data Agreements • Aligned Priorities

Akron, OH

Public Health Outcomes

Challenge: High chronic disease & infant mortality; city has limited control over healthcare systems

What the City Did: Formed cross-sector partnerships with hospitals & public health agencies; integrated health indicators into planning & transportation policy; used shared data to target interventions.

Cincinnati & Hamilton County, OH

Child Poverty

Challenge: High child poverty rates and income disparities across jurisdictions

What the City Did: Convened public, private & community partners; created flexible support funds; leveraged state TANF waiver to address day-to-day financial barriers for families.

Cincinnati, OH

Student Transit Safety

Challenge: School dependence on Metro Transit; student safety at downtown Wright Stop Plaza hub

What the City Did: City, Metro Transit & schools redesigned bus routes; implemented RFID student passes; coordinated staffing & communication strategies to improve safety and reduce risk.

Three Foundational Weaknesses

These systemic gaps undermine Dayton's ability to fulfill human rights obligations across all departments.

01

Communication Systems Don't Reach All Residents

- English-only information despite 5.6% Hispanic/Latino and 6.3% foreign-born population
- Digital-only channels exclude residents without internet access (26.4% live in poverty)
- Residents know about YMCA (higher cost) but not city recreation programmes
- No multilingual materials, no ASL support, no large-print formats

02

No Disaggregated Data Collection

- Zero data on participation by race, gender, income, neighbourhood, age, or disability
- Cannot identify disparities, target interventions, or demonstrate equity
- Cannot answer: Are girls in West Dayton participating equally to boys?
- Human Rights City designation requires transparent monitoring

03

Youth Voices Absent from Decision-Making

- No formal youth advisory structures despite teens being primary recreation users
- Teen Youth Summit is adult-organised — not youth-led
- No meaningful participation channels for young people
- 300 teens attended Mayor's Youth Summit — demand for engagement exists

Equity Gaps: Gender, Safety & Inclusion

Data absence makes discrimination invisible. What is not measured cannot be managed.

NATIONAL DATA: GIRLS IN SPORT

- Girls have 1.3M fewer sport opportunities than boys nationally
- Girls drop out of sports at twice the rate of boys
- 40% of teen girls don't participate vs. 25% of boys
- Organised sports: boys 41% vs. girls 24% (NRPA data)
- Drop-in sports: boys 28% vs. girls 11%

WOMEN'S SAFETY AT RECREATION CENTRES

- Poor lighting — women feel unsafe walking to/from centres in evenings
- No lactation rooms for breastfeeding mothers
- No family changing rooms (single mothers with sons)
- No women-only hours (important for Muslim women, trauma survivors)
- No childcare at fitness facilities
- No teen girls-only spaces — harassment reported in mixed spaces

ALSO INVISIBLE IN DATA:

Turkish community built their own recreation spaces to enable women to swim without men present. LGBTQ+ experiences at pools are unmeasured. Foster care youth (80 group homes in Montgomery County) have no documented access. Youth from group homes have unknown needs.

Recreation is Connected to Every Department

Recreation access cannot be treated in isolation. Policy siloes compound disadvantage — particularly for Dayton's most marginalised residents.

Housing

Right to adequate housing; non-discrimination

Affordable housing concentrated in West Dayton places families furthest from recreation. Section 8 payment standards and landlord discrimination limit where low-income families can live — and therefore which centres they can reach.

Gap: No policy aligns recreation facility distribution with affordable housing concentration.

Safety & Policing

Right to safety; right to dignity

Staff rely heavily on police presence; youth report discomfort with police at centres — creating tension between safety goals and access. Police receive ~60% of the general fund; recreation receives less than 5%. Ratio: 12:1.

Gap: Over-reliance on policing undermines the welcoming, accessible environment recreation requires to fulfil its role in youth development.

Education & Transportation

Right to education; freedom of movement

DPS eliminated yellow bus service for high school students in 2022. A legal challenge restored RTA passes for 2025–26 — but the case continues in court. Alfred Hale III, Dunbar High senior, was shot and killed at Wright Stop Plaza in April 2024 waiting for a bus.

Gap: Transportation segregation: affluent families access multiple recreation options; low-income families cannot access one.

Employment & Civil Service

Right to work; equal access to public service

Civil Service hiring pipelines disadvantage local candidates — the majority of police and fire staff do not reside in Dayton. The Police Chief has highlighted this as a priority concern for community trust and accountability.

Gap: A locally representative workforce is a human rights standard — both for residents and the staff who serve them.

Promising Practices: What Dayton Does Well

Becoming a Human Rights City recognises existing strengths — these are the foundation to build on.

✓ **Strong Leadership Commitment**

Mayor, Commissioners, City Manager and all Directors engaged throughout — explicit support for Human Rights City designation.

✓ **Digital Equity Investment**

\$250,000 in high-speed broadband across all three centres — free access to telehealth, job search, education, financial aid.

✓ **Accessible, Affordable Programming**

\$3/day entry · Annual passes · Free Open Gym & Recess After School · 13,000+ aquatic participants despite pool restrictions.

✓ **Senior Programming Excellence**

Silver Sneakers, dedicated morning hours — 'the seniors were the happiest community members of all' interviewed.

✓ **Youth Development Programmes**

Rec Connect, LEAP Dance, Back 2 Basics, Urban Adventures, Co-Rec Basketball, NFL Flag Football, Kids Entrepreneur Expo — age 3 through teens.

✓ **First Strategic Plan in 20 Years**

Completed 2024 — demonstrates renewed institutional commitment to evidence-based service planning.

Recommendations

Recommendations: A Phased Roadmap

Evidence-based, context-specific, and grounded in the lived experiences of Dayton residents.

IMMEDIATE 1–6 Months

- Reopen GDRC Pool — allocate resources, match hours of other centres
- Free swimming lessons for youth who lost 5 years of access
- Establish supervised after-school youth spaces (2–6 PM)
- Launch disaggregated data collection (race, gender, income, neighbourhood, age)
- Strengthen safety at centres — community-designed, not police-only
- Audit & rebuild community communication systems

MEDIUM-TERM 6–12 Months

- Comprehensive Recreation Policy Review through human rights lens
- Codify recreation as a right; establish equity standards for facility distribution
- Staff training: human rights principles, cultural competency, trauma-informed care
- Bilingual (Spanish) documents, signage, and website translation
- Technology & digital upgrades — gaming, coding, digital art for teens
- Conflict resolution & non-violent communication programming for youth

LONG-TERM 1–3 Years

- City of Dayton: Create multi-stakeholder Human Rights City committee (incl. youth)
- Formally adopt UDHR and relevant treaties as governance norms
- Establish a Human Rights Office with an independent oversight body
- Create human rights indicators and annual progress reporting
- Public multilingual digital dashboard for disaggregated data
- 10-year Neighbourhood Recreation Network — every resident within 10-min walk

Dayton's Opportunity: First in the Nation

Dayton is uniquely positioned to become the **FIRST U.S. city** to pass an ordinance formally becoming a Human Rights City.

Legal Authority

Home-rule charter enables implementation independent of state or federal policies

Community Readiness

High civic awareness · Active organisations · Peace Campaign · Dayton United for Human Rights

International Legacy

1995 Dayton Peace Accords · Sister city partnerships · UD Human Rights Center

Institutional Capacity

Universities, academic partnerships, and a first strategic plan in 20 years

"The city that hosted negotiations ending a European war can now pioneer the framework for cities in the United States to fulfil their human rights obligations — ensuring every resident, in every neighbourhood, has access to the services, safety, and opportunities that human dignity requires."

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With Gratitude

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