

As Trump targets DEI, Republican-led states intensify efforts to stamp it out

By David A. Lieb, apnews.com, May 16, 2025 (adapted)

Republican-led states have been accelerating efforts to stamp out diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, expanding from higher education to other government functions since President Donald Trump fully embraced the movement.

The surge comes as Trump's executive orders seeking to halt DEI initiatives ripple¹ through the federal government, universities and schools, despite legal challenges.

"The federal attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion from the Trump administration have further cleared the path for conservative state legislators," said Shaun Harper, a professor of education, business and public policy at the University of Southern California who founded the National DEI Defense Coalition.

"Despite the Trump administration taking action, the states cannot rely on the federal government to root out DEI for them," said Timothy Minella, senior fellow at the Goldwater Institute.

Efforts to promote diversity, equity and inclusion have existed for years in higher education institutions, businesses and government bureaucracies. Supporters say such initiatives benefit everyone by helping people navigate diverse societies and understand people's differing viewpoints and experiences. Their goal is to promote student bodies and workplaces where everyone feels valued.

That is why some DEI offices have tailored services to people of particular races, genders, sexual orientations and cultures and disabilities. Some institutions also have factored in² equity goals when admitting students, providing scholarships or making employment decisions, to try to reflect society at large.

President Joe Biden's administration required diversity and equity goals in various government programs.

Trump has reversed those efforts, denouncing DEI policies as a form of discrimination that threatens merit-based decision-making. The Republican roll-back gained momentum after the Supreme Court in 2023 struck down racial affirmative action in college admissions. With Trump's return to the presidency, a growing number of businesses have voluntarily withdrawn their DEI programs.

There is no universal definition about what's covered by those initiatives. But most state laws and gubernatorial orders focus on initiatives related to race, ethnicity, gender or sex.

The state measures don't typically mention people with disabilities, military veterans or those from lower-income households, even though they might also be included in an institution's equity efforts, said Paulette Granberry Russell, president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education.

"Diversity, equity and inclusion efforts extends well beyond race, gender and sexuality, but it has been framed in ways that targets those populations and demonize those populations," she said.

Some workers targeted by Trump's anti-DEI measures claim they are being used to justify firing people who happen to be minorities and women. One class-action complaint by federal workers alleges that Trump's anti-DEI executive orders discriminate against employees who aren't white men.

Limits on DEI initiatives in higher education recently approved by legislatures in Missouri and Oklahoma raise the total number of similar state laws and gubernatorial orders to two dozen since 2023. That includes bills passed earlier this year in Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, West Virginia and Wyoming. More are under consideration in additional states.

On his first day in office in West Virginia in January, Republican Gov. Patrick Morrisey ordered an end to DEI staff positions and activities that grant preferential treatment based on race, ethnicity or sex in executive departments and state-funded institutions. On his second day, Republican Indiana Gov. Mike Braun issued a similar order. Kehoe's anti-DEI order came in his second month as Missouri governor.

Texas was among the first states in 2023 to legislate against spending on DEI programs in higher education. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott expanded upon that this year, ordering all state agencies to "comply with the color-blind guarantee" of the U.S. and state constitutions. His executive order described DEI concepts as "blatant efforts to divide people" with "new forms of racism."

1 ripple: *lit. faire des vaguelettes, ici fig. se diffuser.*

2 factor sthg in: *intégrer; prendre en compte*