

US law firms quietly scrub DEI references from websites to appease Trump

Changes at two dozen prestigious firms underscore Trump's successful intimidation campaign against legal profession

Nearly two dozen US law firms have quietly scrubbed references to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) from their website and revised descriptions of pro-bono work to more closely align with [Donald Trump](#)'s priorities, a Guardian review has found, underscoring the [Trump administration's successful campaign](#) of intimidation against the legal profession.

The changes, which have occurred at some of the nation's most prestigious firms, include eliminating mention of pro-bono immigration work from firm websites and deleting sections entirely related to DEI. In some cases, firms appear to have dropped the word "diversity" from descriptions of their work. In at least one case, a change included revising a quote from firm partners to eliminate mention of diversity and inclusion.

The Guardian contacted all of the firms mentioned in this story. None responded to a request for comment.

The changes come as the president has waged a blunt and anti-democratic attack on DEI programs as well as the legal profession. He has sought to punish firms and lawyers who challenge him in court. He has used executive orders to punish five firms that have connections to political rivals, revoking their lawyers' ability to access government buildings, security clearances, and making it extremely difficult for them to represent any client with business before the federal government.

Trump has specifically pointed to diversity programs at the firms he has targeted. Several firms have reached agreements with the president to avoid executive orders in which they have agreed not to use DEI in hiring.

Many of the steps taken by law firms to capitulate to Trump [are being tracked in a spreadsheet](#) by the Coalition for Justice, an alliance of progressive student organizations at Georgetown law school in Washington DC. About a dozen students are keeping a spreadsheet of how hundreds of firms are responding.

"The administration's attacks are so blatantly illegal and unconstitutional that the law firms choosing to comply in advance is really a slap in the face for the legal profession," said Mari Latibashvili, a second-year law student who is a leader of Coalition for Justice and has been helping with the tracker. "It's them saying that they're not willing to stand up for these very basic fundamental constitutional rights – the rule of law, legal ethics and just freedom of speech and expression – I think are just fundamental things that we all learn about first year of law school."

Lawyers at firms have contacted the students with tips, as have general counsels at various companies seeking to place business with firms that have taken a stand against the administration.

More than 500 firms signed an amicus brief last week supporting a [challenge](#) by Perkins Coie to Trump's executive order targeting the firm.

In addition to the executive orders, the Trump administration [sent letters](#) on 17 March to 20 firms asking about efforts to recruit non-white lawyers and suggesting that they may be discriminating

against white people. Experts have raised alarm that the letters are unlawful and that the administration is [giving misleading information](#) about the legality of DEI programs.

One of the firms that received a letter was Latham & Watkins, which is regularly ranked among top firms in the US.

In mid-February, legal recruiters at the firm sent an email to first-year law students across the country inviting them to attend a three-day networking event at the five-star Palace hotel in downtown San Francisco.

The all-expenses paid event, the Diversity Leadership Academy, was designed to offer “insight into practicing at a global law firm and fosters community building with Latham lawyers and peers who share a commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the legal profession”, recruiters said in the email, which was obtained by the Guardian.

“Participants join interactive seminars and discussions focused on Latham’s commitment to DEI, advancing DEI in the legal profession as a whole, and strategies for career success,” the firm’s website for the event said.

But in late March, days before the event was set to take place, the firm sent a follow-up email, abruptly cancelling the event with no explanation. The firm instead would be offering “a series of online events”.

Even though earlier messages had referred to DEI extensively, the cancellation message made no mention of diversity. The name of the event had been wholly changed – it was no longer called the Diversity Leadership Academy but instead the Student Pathways Academy.

One first-year student from a top law school who had planned on attending the event noticed the changes and said it was clear the firm was capitulating to the Trump administration’s crackdown on diversity initiatives.

“It’s very obvious that they don’t want to give an explanation,” said the student, who spoke on condition of anonymity so as not to jeopardize job prospects. “The cowardice is kind of crazy ... it really is just kind of stunning.”

Latham & Watkins also has removed the diversity, equity & inclusion page from its website, according to a Guardian review of an archived version of the website. The [now-deleted page on the site](#) said the firm “is uniquely positioned to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our profession and in our communities. We value all of our colleagues and their perspectives, we fight for social justice, and we educate ourselves to be better allies for each other.”

In its stead is a new page, titled “belong as you are”. It says: “We value colleagues of varied backgrounds, life experiences, and circumstances”. “Our programs are open to all without regard to race, gender, or any other protected characteristics. We seek to bring fresh perspectives from people with varying life experiences to our firm and create an environment in which all can succeed.”

Other firms, including Kirkland & Ellis, Sidley Austin, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, have all removed or edited their diversity pages. All three were [among the 20 firms that received a letter](#) from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in March asking about their diversity programs.

But firms not directly targeted by the Trump administration also appear to have made changes.

As recently [as February](#), Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman’s website included a quote from a firm partner [that said](#) “Pillsbury is committed to structural, sustainable diversity and inclusion. We assess

ourselves honestly, and relentlessly push to be better.”

That quote has now been replaced with another from the same partner that says “Pillsbury invests in its people, expects consummate professionalism, and drives excellent performance. These three “P’s”, together, deliver unparalleled client service.”

Greenberg Traurig, another firm, had the words “culture” “commitment” and “diversity” displayed prominently on the firm’s landing page as recently as January. It has since removed the word “diversity” and replaced it with “engagement”. It also revamped a page on the site focused on diversity to be focused on “Engagement, Culture & Opportunity.”

Several firms also appear to have quietly revised their descriptions of pro-bono work to eliminate things that don’t align with the Trump administration’s priorities.

The firm Cravath, Swaine & Moore, for example, removed “political asylum seekers,” and “victims of racial gender discrimination” [from a description of pro-bono clients it has represented](#). The firm also removed a list of non-profits it has partnered with on pro-bono matters.

Kirkland & Ellis, one of the country’s largest and most profitable firms, removed mention of its relationship to “social justice organizations” from a quote from firm chair Leslie Smith on the pro-bono section of its website. The firm also appears to have edited out mention of its work on behalf of death penalty clients from a list of pro-bono work.

Davis Polk, another major firm, removed mention of immigration and racial justice from a quote on its website from a top lawyer in the pro-bono practice. As recently as February, the lawyers in its pro-bono practice were listed with titles that conveyed which areas they worked on, including racial justice and humanitarian immigration. Those titles have since been removed and all of the firm’s pro-bono lawyers now are listed with the same title: counsel.

Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, which [agreed to offer \\$100m](#) in pro-bono work to the Trump administration, has removed much of its past pro-bono work from its website.

Latibashvili, the Georgetown law student keeping track of the changes, said the removals from the website were not just cosmetic.

“Having information about diversity, equity and inclusion is about what kinds of values you espouse, the people that you hire, the kind of environment that you create in your work, how you talk about legal issues and the cases that you take on,” she said. “If it’s not a big deal, then why are you taking it down?”

Do you have a tip? Please contact sam.levine@theguardian.com or on Signal at 646-886-8761.