# US Corporate Equality Index under fire amid national pushback against diversity initiatives



The landscape of corporate equality in the United States is experiencing turbulence as conservative activists intensify their efforts against diversity initiatives, extending their objections to include gender identity and sexual orientation programs. This development has even affected long-standing tools of workplace equity measurement, such as the Corporate Equality Index (CEI).

The CEI, a project of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), was initiated over two decades ago, during an era when gay men and lesbians were barred from serving openly in the armed forces and same-sex marriages had not yet been legalized. The report card was designed to assess and score companies on their LGBTQ+ inclusive policies, primarily to ensure that gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer employees were protected from discrimination at work and during the hiring process.

The initial rollout in 2002 saw a modest start, with only 13 companies achieving the perfect score. However, the index has grown significantly in impact and scope, and by the previous year, a remarkable 545 businesses had earned top marks. These numbers reflect an expanding set of criteria, which today includes robust non-discrimination policies, equitable benefits for LGBTQ+ employees and their families, and internal education and accountability metrics to bolster an inclusive workplace environment.

In recent months, however, the CEI and its participating companies have become focal points of contention within a broader conservative campaign against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Companies such as Ford, Harley-Davidson, and Lowe’s have publicly declared their withdrawal from the Corporate Equality Index, signalling a notable shift in corporate stances amid external pressures.

This wave of discontent among conservative groups has been invigorated further by a key judicial ruling. Last year, the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional race-based affirmative action programs in college admissions, a decision that has emboldened these groups to pursue similar challenges within corporate spheres. Lawsuits have been filed against businesses leveraging arguments akin to those used in the affirmative action debates, challenging the legality and fairness of initiatives designed to promote diversity and support historically marginalized demographics.

The trajectory of these conservative legal efforts appears to be broadening, now explicitly encompassing workplace initiatives centered around gender identity and sexual orientation. This represents a significant escalation in the pushback against diversity and inclusion programs, targeting not just race or ethnicity but the entirety of DEI programs.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)