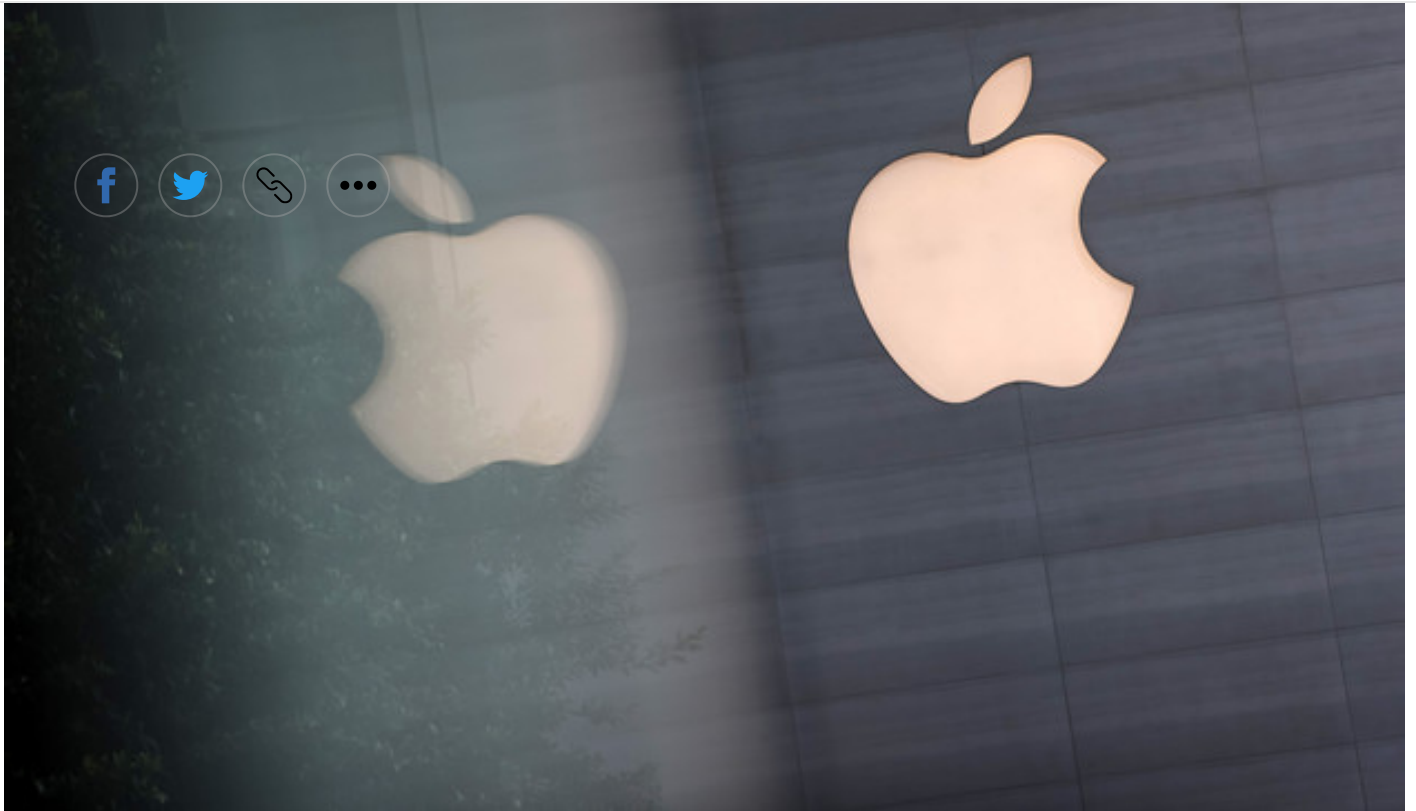


TECHNOLOGY

Apple wields its lobbying might against LGBTQ laws

The tech giant is lobbying, filing court briefs and recruiting allies from other big companies to oppose bills targeting gay and transgender people in states like Iowa, Texas and Florida.



Apple's communications, government affairs and legal offices have also opposed some of the bills, working with policymakers and advocacy groups to plot out strategies and filing court briefs in cases involving LGBTQ rights. And the company is leading part of the broader corporate pushback against the bills — Apple executives have encouraged other large companies to publicly oppose the legislation, arguing that it promotes discrimination and threatens to harm LGBTQ youth.

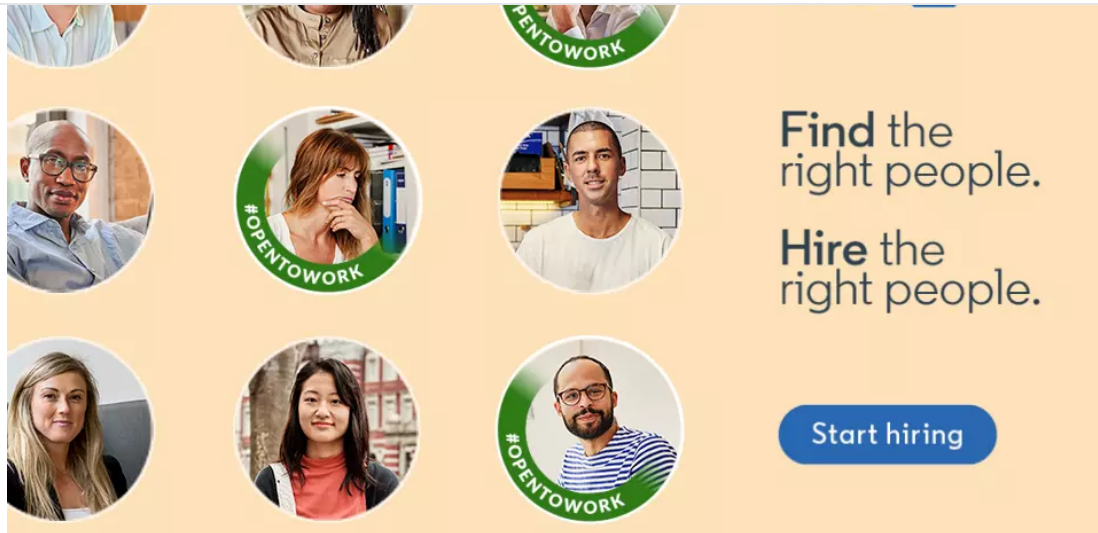
“It’s not just states where they have a headquarters,” said Jay Brown, the senior vice president of programs, research and training at the LGBTQ rights organization Human Rights Campaign. “It’s states where their customers are, which is all across the country. It is significant in terms of staff time and resources.”

Apple’s senior director of corporate communications, Fred Sainz, this month pressed leaders of fellow Fortune 500 companies to denounce an order by the Texas governor that called for [child abuse investigations of parents](#) who provide transgender children with gender-affirming care despite opposition from doctors.

“I’m reaching out from Apple because we’re hoping you’ll join us and lend your company’s name to a critical issue,” wrote Sainz, who was formerly the vice president of communications and marketing at the HRC, in an email to his corporate affairs counterparts on March 5.

“Apple has joined the effort and will lend its name and logo,” Sainz said in the email, obtained by POLITICO. “I’m reaching out because we are hoping you will too.” Ultimately, [60 other organizations](#) signed on to the letter, which was published in The Dallas Morning News on March 11.

The fight is not merely a values-driven issue for businesses like Apple. [Studies have shown that companies struggle](#) to recruit and retain employees — particularly the younger, college-educated workers that Apple relies on — in states that consider or pass legislation targeting LGBTQ people. And the tech industry is [known for having a high concentration of trans employees](#), meaning Apple is responding to the needs of its workforce.



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The advocacy poses political risks for Apple as Republicans begin to criticize the company's opposition to the bills. Some Republicans in Iowa have argued that Apple should not continue to receive state subsidies as it opposes legislation banning trans girls from participating in high school sports that match their gender identity.

“Apple framed the law as part of a ‘social agenda’ rather than fairness for women’s sports,” [Republican Iowa state Sen. Zach Nunn told Fox News](#). “That becomes a concerning issue when we have a major industry who attempts to come in and force public policy based on an agenda they may have in a boardroom out of state.”

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—Fred Sainz, Apple's senior director of corporate communications, in an email asking other Fortune 500 companies to speak out against a Texas order aimed at families of trans kids.

The advocacy is notable considering that Apple has often shied away from the political spotlight. The company doesn't have a political action committee or make campaign donations, maintains a smaller federal lobbying presence than its big tech peers and often does not engage with the news media on policy issues.

But behind the scenes, it is one of the most active corporate advocates for LGBTQ rights, according to four organizers on the ground in states where legislation is moving. The company has tried to leverage its greatest assets — the popularity of its products and the size of its employee base in the U.S. — to crush the legislation.

Apple spokesperson Peter Ajemian confirmed in a statement that the company “regularly lobbies against anti-LGBTQ+ legislation across the states, just as we did in Florida.”

legislation in Iowa that would ban transgender girls from participating in girls K-12 or collegiate sports.

Apple doesn't work much with state advocacy groups, however. The pro-LGBTQ group Equality Florida said in an email that its staff hadn't noticed any of Apple's lobbying against the new state law that [restricts teachers from talking about gender and sexuality in the classroom](#), which critics have dubbed the "Don't Say Gay" law. Supporters of the new law say it would ensure that the state's youngest students learn about sexual orientation and gender identity from their parents and not at school, but opponents say it will create a hostile environment for gay and transgender children or children from LGBTQ families.

Apple's advocacy mainly entails partnering closely with the Human Rights Campaign. Apple said it works as part of a national coalition that is active in all 50 states, and its government affairs teams work closely with the HRC discussing strategy and direct lobbying. Apple is one of the most active participants in the group's corporate membership calls and regularly encourages its peers to get involved in the HRC's state-level fights. In Florida, for instance, Apple said it worked with a national coalition organized by the HRC to speak out and lobby against the legislation.

Democratic Florida state Sen. Shevrin Jones said he believes that corporations "fell asleep at the wheel" when it came to opposing the Florida law.

Jones, a vocal opponent of the legislation, added that he "never heard from Apple."

"Right now, we're in a moment where corporations are being challenged on where they stand and lobby on social issues," Jones said. "This is a teachable moment for them to realize that the moment these things come out drafting and get filed, they should step up right then and there."

its lobbying operations around the country to [oppose regulations that could affect its app store](#) in an increasing number of states, an effort that anti-monopoly activists have derided as an aggressive show of corporate influence. Apple has 26 registered lobbyists in Florida — a government affairs team that is larger than those of almost all corporations in the state, besides Disney and Tampa Electric Co.

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And Apple has [nine registered lobbyists](#) in Arizona, including Kirk Adams, a former chief of staff to Republican Gov. Doug Ducey and a past speaker of the state House. Those lobbyists have been fighting hard against the app store regulations while opposing bills aimed at LGBTQ people during the past year, parlaying the relationships they have formed in the app store battle to push against bills affecting trans children.

“Apple has been an incredible partner for the LGBTQ community,” said Democratic Arizona state Rep. César Chávez, who has opposed anti-LGBTQ legislation such as the bills that Ducey [signed into law](#) this week. Chávez said he remembers Apple asking about Arizona’s LGBTQ rights record when the company first [invested in the state in 2013](#).

But Chávez said he thinks Apple did not do enough to leverage its economic power in Arizona before Ducey signed the bills.

the community, but unless you're actively seeking to change the route of this kind of legislation, those are just words," Chávez said. "They could've done more."

Some progressive advocates are skeptical of Apple's heavy involvement in the debate. Apple's app store and developers have [censored LGBTQ apps in 152 countries around the world](#), according to research by the digital rights group Fight for the Future and China-based GreatFire, a nonprofit organization that tracks censorship in that country. (Apple, which calls the report "riddled with misinformation," has said many of those apps were removed by developers themselves, and that Apple took down only a handful because of legal issues.)

"Apple has such restrictive and monopolistic app store policies, it creates a convenient chokepoint for authoritarianism and discrimination," said Evan Greer, director of Fight for the Future. "That's how I evaluate a company — they can wave the rainbow flag all they want but at the end of the day, Apple is conducting itself in a manner that's harming my community."

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Ultimately, it's not clear that business advocacy makes a difference in the first place.

Policies affecting transgender children went into effect in Texas, Florida, Arizona and Tennessee despite companies' protestations, and nearly [240 bills aimed at limiting the rights of LGBTQ people have been filed in state](#)

eagerness to fall against woke corporations involvement in issues such as social equality, climate change and immigration, weakening the leverage that big business has brought to past fights on debates such as same-sex marriage.

“The efficacy of making big public statements is lower than it used to be,” said Jessica Shortall, managing director of the gay rights business group Texas Competes. “But Apple does the work.” Apple has more than 6,000 employees in Texas.

The company’s advocacy comes as businesses across the country struggle to address legislation affecting LGBTQ people. Although corporations — and Silicon Valley in particular — have long argued that discriminatory legislation harms their employees and their bottom lines, the GOP has rallied around [proposals to limit transgender rights](#) and [restrict care for trans youth](#), similar to the way that Republicans including former President George W. Bush [once pushed to ban same-sex marriage](#). Companies that stand against legislation affecting the LGBTQ community, such as Disney in Florida, [risk blowback from the populist right](#).


Apple generally has been quieter in public about the most recent legislation, compared with its lobbying in 2015 against “religious freedom” laws that would have allowed businesses to turn away LGBTQ customers and potential hires, according to two people familiar with its strategy who were granted anonymity to discuss private conversations. That earlier fight [included a Washington Post op-ed by Cook](#).

That’s in part a strategic decision — some activists believe it is more effective for companies in the current environment to work privately with lawmakers rather than deploying public pressure.

Shortall, with Texas Competes, said she has seen more than 800 bills aimed at LGBTQ people emerge in state legislatures since she began her work in 2015, but most of them did not get a hearing or advance out of committee. “One big reason is because companies weigh in quietly behind the scenes,” she said. “That’s often the most effective way, and certainly the least traumatic way for LGBTQ+ people who are very traumatized by this huge flood of bills.”

Chávez, the Arizona state legislator, argued that it’s still important for corporations like Apple to use their economic leverage and public platforms to fight for the LGBTQ community. Corporate boycotts against North Carolina in 2017 [cost the state \\$3.76 billion](#), prompting the state to [repeal a law that had what bathrooms transgender people could use](#).

“I can almost guarantee you that if we gathered 1,000 people in one room, the majority of those individuals have iPhones in their pockets,” Chávez said. “Especially within the LGBTQ+ community, [corporations] need to face the fact that they need us. And that if they want us to continue to purchase their products and services, they also have to be there for those individuals who are there for them.”

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