

AS ATTACKS AGAINST DE&I HEIGHTEN, COSTCO AND APPLE PROVE INCLUSION REMAINS GOOD BUSINESS

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Under President Donald Trump's Project 2025, the administration has launched an unprecedented effort to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) programs. Federal agencies are now prohibited from observing Black History Month, and employees involved in DE&I initiatives have been terminated. Critics argue these measures represent a full-on attack on marginalized communities and signal a clear directive for corporations to follow suit. Trump's administration, which has no diversity in its ranks, has been accused of setting a dangerous precedent.

Some companies, however, remain committed to their DE&I efforts. Organizations like Costco, JPMorgan Chase, Delta Airlines, American Airlines, Southwest Airlines, and Apple continue to view diversity as a cornerstone of their workforce strategies, refusing to back down despite mounting pressure from conservatives and the White House.

Corporations Holding the Line

Costco's board of directors recently rejected the National Center for Public Policy Research (NCPPr) proposal that sought to force the company to publish risks associated with its DE&I programs or eliminate them entirely. The board reaffirmed the company's commitment to inclusion ahead of a January 23 shareholder vote.

"Our success at Costco Wholesale has been built on service to our critical stakeholders: employees, members, and suppliers," the board said in a statement reported by Forbes. "Our efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion follow our code of ethics. These efforts remind and reinforce with everyone at our company the importance of creating opportunities for all."

JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon has also resisted calls to retreat from diversity programs. "We will continue to reach out to the Black community, the Hispanic community, the veterans community, and LGBTQ. We have teams with second chance initiatives — governors in blue states and red states like what we do," Dimon said in an interview with CNBC.

Apple's leadership has similarly rejected proposals to scale back DE&I, labeling such measures as attempts to "micromanage" the company's operations. The board stated, "The proposal is unnecessary as Apple already has a well-established compliance program," as reported by Tech Xplore.

Walmart's Retreat Draws Outrage

Walmart, by contrast, joined corporations like Meta, McDonald's, Ford Motor Co., and Molson Coors in rolling back its DE&I initiatives. In response, long-term shareholders representing \$266 billion in

funds wrote a letter to CEO Doug McMillon on January 14, expressing their disappointment.

"Seeing the company retreat from its stated values and the business opportunities associated with a diverse and inclusive workforce is very disheartening," the letter, organized by the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, stated.

Caroline Boden of Mercy Investment Services, a signatory of the letter, added, "DEI initiatives aren't just 'nice to have,' they are essential to breaking down systemic inequities hindering our economy and preventing society from fully thriving. Inequity is bad for business and, ultimately, investors."

A coalition of 14 attorneys general, including Maryland's Anthony G. Brown, also sent Walmart a letter urging reconsideration. Speaking to *CBS News*, Brown said, "When major companies roll back their commitments to these efforts, they signal to smaller businesses that it is acceptable to do the same, creating a ripple effect that inflicts lasting harm across our State and nation."

Advocates Warn of Long-Term Consequences

Leaders in DE&I initiatives continue challenging corporate rollbacks, warning of the harm such decisions could cause. Tinisha Bookhart, co-founder and director of IT and DE&I at Primary Talent Partners, described the move to abandon diversity programs as deeply troubling. "When implemented correctly, DE&I solutions aim to provide opportunities to qualified individuals who, due to conscious or unconscious bias, might not otherwise have them. Abandoning DE&I altogether is a grave misstep that only serves to perpetuate existing disparities in the workforce," she said.

In an interview with CWS 3.0, Omni Inclusive CEO Perry Charlton said corporations like Costco and Apple serve as shining examples of why DE&I matters. "Diversity in the contingent workforce is not just a moral imperative — it's an essential driver of innovation, growth, and long-term success. Abandoning these efforts now undermines progress and jeopardizes the future of equitable work environments," Charlton said.

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