

BUSINESS RESPONSE TO U.S. ABORTION LEGISLATION

On May 15, 2019, the governor of Alabama signed into law a measure that would ban most abortions in the state, with limited exceptions. Several states, including Louisiana, Georgia and Missouri, followed suit over the next several weeks. Throughout this time, and in the weeks after, many companies and organizations issued comments about the abortion bans or signed letters or petitions in protest. By July 3rd, Weber Shandwick captured reactions from 362 organizations, ranging from small and local to large and global. The following report is part of our business response series, which explores CEO and corporate reactions to challenging societal issues.

Of the 362 organizations that responded through July 3, 2019...

- + The vast majority were signatories to the “Don’t Ban Equality” campaign, which is a letter stating that restricted access to reproductive care, including abortion, threatens the health, independence and economic stability of employees and customers. 64% signed the original letter which appeared in *The New York Times*, and another 29% signed the [website letter](#) which went online after the advertisement.
- + Following “Don’t Ban Equality,” organizations were most likely to speak out through Twitter (13%) and media statements (9%).
- + 96% had the head of their company (e.g., CEO, Founder, President) as lead spokesperson or signatory.
- + Only 2% are U.S./Global Fortune 500 companies, which is the lowest rate of [all of our business response analyses](#).
- + The largest proportion came from the business services sector (31%), followed by tech (15%), apparel (13%) and household products (9%).
- + 89% are headquartered in Blue states (i.e., leaned Democratic in 2016 presidential election) and 8% are in Red states (i.e., leaned Republican). 3% are international.
- + 93% are “new” activists who have not been vocal on other events from our business response series.
- + 2% offered support to women, including donations, fundraising and travel arrangements for abortion services.
- + 2% said they would reconsider conducting business in a state with restrictive abortion legislation.

INSIGHTS

1. **Organizations are speaking out on the most contentious of issues.** Previous Weber Shandwick [research](#) found that abortion ranked last on a list of issues Americans think CEOs and business leaders should express an opinion on. Despite this being a contentious issue, we saw a great number of organizations speaking out this time.
2. **Companies don’t always have to take a side in order to speak out.** While most organizations offered pro-abortion rights views, some remained neutral. A handful even said it’s not a company’s role to take a side.
3. **Different organizations respond to different issues.** Very few organizations that spoke out about the abortion bans have done so for other issues we’ve tracked. Speaking out on one issue doesn’t mean you have to respond to all. In this case, organizations may be responding to an issue that reflects stakeholder interest.
4. **There is strength in numbers.** The vast majority of responses to the abortion bans came from a jointly signed advertisement and website. Organizations wanting to lend their voices can do so in partnership with others.
5. **Smaller organizations are lending their voices.** Large revenue companies are not the only ones who can take the lead when it comes to taking stands on contentious issues.

In terms of the content of the responses...

- + 99% were pro-abortion rights or anti-bans. 1% were neutral toward the bans.
- + 79% signed their names to “Don’t Ban Equality” without providing additional commentary. 14% signed the ad and also provided additional commentary.
- + 95% talked about women’s rights in their responses, 94% focused on economic consequences, 93% talked about health and medicine, 93% referred to their organization’s values, 93% stated support for employees and 93% mentioned workplace equality.

For more information, please contact:

MICHO SPRING
Chair, Global Corporate Practice
Weber Shandwick
mspring@webershandwick.com

LESLIE GAINES-ROSS
Chief Reputation Strategist
Weber Shandwick
lgaines-ross@webershandwick.com

PAUL MASSEY
President, Powell Tate & Global Lead Social Impact
Weber Shandwick
pmassey@webershandwick.com