

# Florida loses court bid to revive 'woke' workplace training ban

By [Nate Raymond](#)

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Republican presidential candidate and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis speaks during a campaign visit ahead of the South Carolina presidential primary in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, U.S. January 20, 2024. REUTERS/Randall Hill/File Photo [Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tab](#)

March 4 (Reuters) - A U.S. appeals court on Monday held that a Florida law championed by Republican Governor Ron DeSantis that banned mandatory workplace diversity training that promotes progressive concepts violates employers' constitutional free speech rights.

A three-judge panel of the Atlanta-based 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals [upheld, opens new tab](#) a lower-court [judge's ruling](#) that blocked the law at the request of two small businesses and a consultant who conducts workplace training.

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The Stop the Wrong to Our Kids and Employees Act, or Stop WOKE Act, was signed into law in 2022 by DeSantis and states that employers cannot require workers to attend training that promotes eight specific concepts.

Those include that individuals are inherently racist or sexist and that people should feel guilty about the actions of members of their race or sex. Employers who violate the law can face significant financial penalties.

U.S. Circuit Judge Britt Grant, writing for Monday's panel, said the law violated the free speech protections of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment by barring discussions about topics the state finds "offensive" but not other ones.

"Florida may be exactly right about the nature of the ideas it targets," Grant wrote. "Or it may not. Either way, the merits of these views will be decided in the clanging marketplace of ideas rather than a codebook or a courtroom."

Grant's opinion was joined by U.S. Circuit Judges Andrew Brasher and Charles Wilson. Grant and Brasher are appointees of Republican former President Donald Trump, while Wilson was appointed by Democratic former President Bill Clinton.

A spokesperson for Republican Attorney General Ashley Moody, whose is defending the law in court, said her office is reviewing the decision.

The Stop WOKE Act is a high-profile example of [laws adopted](#) by Republican-led states in recent years that discourage companies from taking stances on gun control, climate change, diversity and other social issues.

The challenge to the law was filed by Honeyfund.com Inc and Primo Tampa LLC, two businesses that wanted to host training sessions highlighting "diversity, equity, and inclusion" issues, and consulting firm Whitespace Consulting.

"Today is a good day for the First Amendment and the ability of American businesses to speak freely," Shalini Goel Agarwal, a lawyer for the plaintiffs at the advocacy group Protect Democracy, said in a statement.

A lower-court judge in 2022 also [blocked separate provisions](#) of the law that restrict discussions of race and sex in college classrooms, in a lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union. Florida has appealed that decision to the 11th Circuit.

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