

BAY AREA//SAN FRANCISCO

S.F. repeals its boycott of 30 states that passed conservative laws. Here's why

J.D. Morris

April 25, 2023 Updated: April 25, 2023 6:42 p.m.



Supervisor Rafael Mandelman speaks at the S.F. Board of Supervisors at City Hall in San Francisco in March. Mandelman sponsored the legislation to repeal a law that prevented the city from doing business with companies in states that limited LGBTQ and voting rights, and abortion access.

Salgu Wissmath/The Chronicle

San Francisco will no longer boycott 30 states that passed conservative laws after city officials determined that the restrictions were too costly and had little impact other than adding more bureaucracy.

The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted to repeal a local law that prevented city employees from traveling to or doing business with companies based in

[S.F. repeals its boycott of 30 states that passed conservative laws \(sfchronicle.com\)](https://www.sfchronicle.com/bay-area/article/sf-repeals-boycott-30-states-conservative-laws-17800000)

states that had passed laws limiting LGBTQ rights, voting rights and abortion access.

Supervisors rolled back the entire law in a 7-4 vote just one month after the board agreed to exempt construction contracts from the boycott. Mayor London Breed has already said she supports repealing or reforming the underlying law.

“It’s not achieving the goal we want to achieve,” said Supervisor Rafael Mandelman, who sponsored the legislation that repealed the whole boycott. “It is making our government less efficient.”

The boycott law was originally passed by supervisors in 2016 and first applied only to states that had restricted LGBTQ rights after the Supreme Court’s 2015 decision legalizing same-sex marriage across the country. Supervisors amended the law in subsequent years to apply also to states that placed new limits on abortion access and voting rights.

A central goal of the boycott was to put pressure on other states, but a recent report by City Administrator Carmen Chu’s office found that only one state had been removed from the list and none ever said they changed their laws because of San Francisco’s. Additionally, the report found that the law made city contracting a more cumbersome and expensive process.

An earlier report from the board’s Budget and Legislative Analyst found that implementing the boycott had cost the city nearly \$475,000 in staffing expenses. And the city was approving a large number of exemptions to the boycott anyway: Departments granted 538 waivers for contracts worth \$791 million between mid-2021 and mid-2022, the report found. The legislative analyst said the full effect of the boycott on the city’s contract costs was difficult to pin down but pointed to past research that had found that a fully competitive process could produce savings up to 20%.

“We haven’t changed a single law. We have made competitive bidding less competitive,” said Supervisor Matt Dorsey. “I think San Franciscans would be angry if they knew the amount of hoops that have to be jumped through and the added cost to city contracting.”

Supervisors Shamann Walton, Connie Chan, Dean Preston and Myrna Melgar voted against repealing the boycott, in part because they thought the city should have spent more time considering how the repeal would affect local small businesses.

“There can be so many unintended consequences with this repeal,” Walton said, adding that some states have been “doubling down” on their restrictions and he did not want the city to give anyone the impression “that we are not still fighting against these discriminatory practices and laws.”

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Before coming to The Chronicle, he reported on local government for the Santa Rosa Press Democrat, where he was among the journalists awarded a Pulitzer Prize for their coverage of the 2017 North Bay wildfires.

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