

Transgender Freedom Alliance Case Study

Anticipating and neutralizing anti-transgender attack ads: Virginia gubernatorial election, 2025

11/10/25

In the 2025 Virginia gubernatorial election, Abigail Spanberger successfully neutralized \$11,000,000 in anti-trans attacks (spending about half that amount in ads that blunted the attacks) and won in a rout, with a margin of ~15% and coattails that gave her a Democratic super-majority in the House of Delegates. These were the best Democratic results in Virginia for decades.

The anti-trans ads didn't work because Abigail anticipated the attacks, developed a thoughtful response, tested it, made the ads and had them ready to go when the attack came. And critically - once the attacks began she spent significant dollars to neutralize them. And by doing that, she was able to reach the electorate with her messages about affordability and economic growth.

The day after Labor Day, Republican nominee (and sitting Lieutenant Governor) Winsome Earl-Sears put up [this attack ad](#) hitting Spanberger with an ad that is quite reminiscent of the "They/Them" ad from the 2024 cycle. The Spanberger campaign responded within hours with an [excellent ad](#) based on [TFA public research](#), which utilized her biography to showcase shared values around parenting, safety, and being for all Virginians. Specifically, Spanberger's ad effectively highlighted her credibility as a mom of daughters in VA public schools, using a tone that exuded toughness, acknowledged concerns about safety, and reassured voters of her credentials as someone who keeps kids safe - while showcasing that she is for ALL Virginians.

In the final two months of the campaign, Earl-Sears spent more than **\$11,000,000** on TV and digital ads attacking Abigail on transgender issues. The Spanberger campaign continued to respond through Election Day, investing almost **\$6,000,000** in ads running on TV and digital platforms. In the first several weeks of September, the Spanberger campaign matched the Earl-Sears' campaign on TV and digital; they then reduced the TV spend while continuing to ensure that everyone who saw an attack on a digital platform saw a response ad. Examples of the ads (both the Sears attacks and the Spanberger responses) are linked in the attached [analysis](#). Three of the four ads Abigail ran to neutralize the attack ads were derived from the research TFA and GSG did this summer.

The key point we take from this election is that the anti-trans ads didn't work because Abigail anticipated the attacks, developed a thoughtful response, tested it, made the ads and had them ready to go when the attack came. And critically - once the attacks began she spent significant dollars to neutralize them. And by doing that, she was able to reach the electorate with her messages about affordability and economic growth.

Here is a [memo](#) from our research partners at GSG detailing their findings in VA, NJ and WI.

To learn more, please contact us at:

Adrienne Kimmell, akimmell@sparksolutions.us

David Steinglass, david@transgenderfreedomalliance.org

Coverage

[Republicans Anti-Trans Attacks Didn't Work This Election. They Still Want to Use the Playbook in 2026](#), Oriana Gonzalez, November 7, 2025, [NOTUS](#)

[Earle-Sears's focus on culture issues in Virginia risks backfiring](#), Julia Manchester, September 28, 2025, [The Hill](#)

[Spotlight: Are Reheating Trump's Nachos a Winning Meal for Republicans?](#), Kirk A. Bado, September 5, 2025, [National Journal](#)

[Earle-Sears Is Four Years Late for the Outrage Cycle](#), Spencer Neale, August 24, 2025, [The American Conservative](#)