Google accused of blocking pro-life referendum message

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Google must answer questions about whether it or its employees engaged in an active campaign to prevent Irish voters from accessing information online during Ireland's referendum on the 8th amendment, the former campaign group Save the 8th has said.

A document provided to a prominent American campaign group, Project Veritas, and released to the public, purports to show a vast list of topics blacklisted by YouTube during the referendum on the 8th amendment. These include subjects like 'unborn life', 'repeal the 8th state funding', and searches related to Ireland's record on maternal safety.

Campaign groups Life Institute and Save the 8th were also on the list.

During the referendum campaign, Google cancelled all advertising relating to the issue on its platforms, generating outrage amongst campaign groups, including Save the 8th, who had pre-booked substantial expenditures on those platforms and were subsequently unable to replace that advertising at short notice.

However, the allegations made by Project Veritas are of an even more serious nature, Niamh Uí Bhriain, of Save the 8th and Life Institute, said.

"The allegation here is that Google actively sought to prevent ordinary voters from accessing the full array of information on something as benign as 'unborn life'.
"There is no explanation for interfering with the results for a search of that term that is not sinister," Ms Uí Bhriain told *The Catholic Universe*.

"In an era where the establishment appears to be engaged in a moral panic about the dangers of external election interference, it is patently obvious that the biggest meddlers in Irish elections are multinational corporations like Google, who literally have the power to alter the information available to Irish voters without a word of criticism or oversight from the Irish media, or Irish political leadership," she continued.

“At minimum, Google should be asked whether this document is accurate. If it is a false allegation, it is very important that we know this and that the public, especially many people who campaigned hard on the defeated side of that referendum, are reassured,” said Ms Uí Bhriain.

She pointed out that if the allegation is true, Google must be required to explain in public why it took the steps that it did, and whether it was done at the instigation of anyone outside the company.

“The public have a right to expect that referendum campaigns are conducted fairly, with equal opportunity for both sides to present their case,” Ms Uí Bhriain added. “When a large corporation is engaged in an effort to block the most fundamental and basic elements of one side’s case from being heard, that is gravely concerning.”

Photo: Employees arrive at Google’s Irish. Credit: Niall Carson/PA