The Bill

Throughout the country people of color have been discriminated against in professional and educational settings because of their hair. Seven states have passed The CROWN Act into law and in 2020 H.R. 5309 was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and sent to the Senate. The CROWN Act extends statutory protection to hair texture and protective styles in the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) and State Education Codes. The YWCA Hartford Region joins the chorus of justice urging Connecticut lawmakers to pass legislation that prohibits discrimination based on hair style and hair texture.

The Facts

- In 2016, the Eleventh Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals held that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of hairstyle- stating that hairstyles only have a cultural link to race or Blackness, rather than being an immutable trait of one’s race
- Black women’s hair is 3.4 times more likely to be perceived as unprofessional
- Black women are 30% more likely to be made aware of a formal workplace appearance policy
- Black women are 1.5 times more likely to be sent home from the workplace because of their hair
- Black women are 83% more likely to report being judged more harshly on her looks than other women
- Black women are 80% more likely to change their natural hair to fit in at their office
- Perming natural hair can have extremely damaging effects from hair breakage to hair loss or even infections

The Solution

While anti-discrimination laws presently protect the choice to wear an afro, afros are not the only natural presentation of Black hair. The CROWN Act ensures protection against discrimination based on hairstyles by specifying in Connecticut General Statutes Title 46A. Human Rights § 46a-51 that the protected class of race also includes traits historically associated with race identification, such as hair texture and hairstyles. This bill will prohibit employers from enforcing purportedly “race neutral” grooming policies that disproportionately impact persons of color. By advancing the acceptance of protective hairstyles within corporate culture, this bill will draw attention to cultural and racial sensitivity in workplace grooming policies, extending beyond hair. The CROWN Act encourages an intentional reform of the Eurocentric image of professionalism in order to ensure and protect diversity in the workplace.

The Stories

Chastity Jones: An employer rescinded a job offer at an Alabama call center because Jones refused to cut her locs. Jones sued the company in 2013 for discrimination and lost wages, but her claim was dismissed, ultimately leading to the 2016 decision in the U.S. Court of Appeals.

Kerion Washington: A 17-year old from Fort Worth, TX was denied a job at Six Flags because the park’s human resources department, which stood by the guidelines, compared having dreadlocks with tattoos or piercings, and claimed they were excessive.

Faith Fennidy: In August of 2018, Faith, a Louisiana sixth grader, was kicked off school grounds because her braided hair violated school policy

1 Statistics from the Dove CROWN Act Research study: https://www.thecrownact.com
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5edc69fd622c36173f56651f/t/5edeaa2fe5ddef345e087361/1591650865168/Dove_research_brochure2020_FINAL3.pdf