



THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

November 23, 2021

Senator Jamie Eldridge
Representative Michael Day
Joint Committee on the Judiciary
24 Beacon St.
Boston, MA 02133

Re: H.1907, *An Act prohibiting discrimination based on natural hairstyles*.

Dear Chair Eldridge, Chair Day, and members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary,

I am writing as the State Representative for the 12th Suffolk District, representing parts of Hyde Park, Mattapan, and Dorchester in the City of Boston, and parts of the town of Milton. Thank you so much for holding this hearing and for considering H.1907, *An Act prohibiting discrimination based on natural hairstyles*, presented by Reps. Ultrino and Tyler. I urge you to support this legislation and pass this bill out of committee with a favorable report.

I am proud to stand with my sisters in service as the four Black women in the Massachusetts State House, supporting the Crown Act- H.1907. This bill provides legal protection from hair discrimination in key areas, such as school, work, and public spaces; and this bill's effect will be felt indirectly to shape professional norms.

I wanted to share my personal experience with the committee. When I was a public defender with the Committee for Public Counsel Services, every time that I would litigate in court, I would arrange to have my hair straightened. I knew that if I did not, that I risked being discriminated against by a judge, court officer, opposing counsel, or the jury. We need to protect Black women legally against this discrimination, and change the norms of professionalism to include all natural hair.

Unfortunately, this experience is common for Black women. 80% of Black women, like myself, felt the need to change their natural hair to fit in with workplace standards. And that risk of discrimination is also real, with 63.5% of people displaying implicit bias against textured natural hair. This imposes costs on Black women, damages our hair, takes up precious time, and forces conformity with expectations that are antiquated and discriminatory.

For these reasons, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts should enact H.1907, *An Act prohibiting discrimination based on natural hairstyles*. I commend the Joint Committee on the Judiciary for scheduling this hearing, and I hope that the Committee will report the bill out favorably. Thank you so much for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BFO' followed by a stylized flourish.

Rep. Brandy Fluker Oakley
12th Suffolk District