



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

November 23, 2021

The Honorable Michael Day, House Chair
Joint Committee on the Judiciary
24 Beacon Street, Room 511-C
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable James Eldridge, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on the Judiciary
24 Beacon Street, Room 136
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairs Day and Eldridge, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide this testimony. We write to you today in unwavering support of H.1907, S.994, and S.1049, “An Act prohibiting discrimination based on natural hairstyles.” This bill would make it clear that discrimination based on natural and protective hairstyles will not be tolerated in the Commonwealth. The protections instituted in this bill would protect only natural hair texture, and natural and protective hairstyles, with no impact on workplace safety regulations or the wearing of non-natural, non-protective styles.

People of color across the Commonwealth, particularly Black women, continue to face racial discrimination at work, in school, and in public spaces based on the texture and style of their hair. The policies and practices that enforce this discrimination work around existing law by claiming to focus not on race, but rather on “professionalism.” However, these same policies, in defining hair textures and styles associated with race as “unprofessional,” make clear their true aim: exclusion.

These exclusionary policies and their impacts on workplace culture combine to mean that black women’s hair is more than 3 times more likely to be perceived as unprofessional. As a result, black women are 30% more likely to be approached about workplace appearance policies and 50% more likely to be sent home from work because of their hair than white women. What’s more, Black women are also 83% more likely to report being judged more harshly based on their

appearance, and 80% more likely to have to change their hair from its natural state to fit in at the office.¹

The impact of these discriminatory appearance policies cannot be overstated. Not only do they make it more difficult for people of color to find and hold jobs, pursue their education, and engage in our economy as consumers, they also continually reinforce the idea that “Black” is synonymous with “less than.” In the face of the enormous and growing body of research which tells us that generations of racist policies have already made people of color, and specifically black women, perceive themselves as less beautiful, less professional, and less worthy of opportunity, we cannot allow this harmful practice and the message it sends to the people of the Commonwealth to continue.

Each year that we allow this discrimination to persist unabated is another year we allow its message to spread; another year in which, through inaction, we endorse the belief that a part of someone’s identity can make them less deserving of love, of education, of opportunity, and of success. And with each year that we allow the spread of that message, the work ahead of us to correct for its impact grows.

With this in mind, we once again voice our enthusiastic support for H.1907, S.994, and S.1049, and urge you to report the bill favorably from committee.

Sincerely,



Steven Ultrino Ed.D.
State Representative
33rd Middlesex District



Sal DiDomenico
State Senator
Middlesex and Suffolk District

¹ C.R.O.W.N. Research Study (2019). Joy Collective.
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