



March 13th, 2024

The Honorable Representative Joseph M. McNamara
Chair of the House Education
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support to H- 7724 - The Crown Act

Dear Chairman McNamara and Esteemed Members of the House Education Committee,

I am Francesca Raelison, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Program Manager at the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island (MHARI), reaching out to express our strong support for House Bill 7724, The Crown Act. This landmark bill aims to prohibit discrimination based on hair texture and hairstyles, such as braids, locs, twists, and Bantu knots, by expanding the definitions of race and ethnicity. Its passage is crucial for upholding the dignity and equality of all individuals, particularly those in Black communities who have been disproportionately affected by hair-based discrimination.

The Crown Act is more than legislation; it's a statement against systemic discrimination that has long plagued our schools and workplaces. A 2019 Dove Crown Act study highlighted a distressing reality: black women's hair is 3.4 times more likely to be perceived as unprofessional. This bias not only undermines individual identity but perpetuates a cycle of racial prejudice and inequality.

At MHARI, we witness firsthand the mental health impact of such discrimination. Racial trauma, manifested through policies that police natural hair, contributes to a spectrum of psychological effects, including diminished self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. By advocating for The Crown Act, we aim to address these deep-seated biases and foster an environment where diversity is celebrated, not penalized.

On a personal note, I too have felt the sting of hair-based discrimination. Growing up with frizzy hair, I was subjected to bullying at school and even at home. My hair, which did not conform to the 'norm,' was a source of ridicule and embarrassment, significantly impacting my self-esteem and confidence. These experiences have fueled my passion for this cause, making it not just a professional endeavor but a deeply personal one as well.

As DEI Program Manager, I am committed to leveraging MHARI's resources to promote The Crown Act's importance. Through education and advocacy, we can shift societal norms and encourage a broader understanding and acceptance of cultural and racial diversity. Our collaborative efforts with educators, legislators, and community leaders are essential in paving the way for meaningful change.



Mental Health Association of Rhode Island
An Affiliate of Mental Health America

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The passage of The Crown Act in Rhode Island will mark a significant step forward in our ongoing fight against racial discrimination and inequality. It's a testament to our collective commitment to creating a society where every individual can express their identity freely and without fear of retribution.

We urge the committee to recognize the profound impact of this bill on the lives of countless individuals and to lead Rhode Island towards a more equitable and inclusive future by enacting The Crown Act.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership on this critical issue.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'FR' with a stylized flourish.

Francesca Raelison
DEI Program Manager
francesca.raelison@mhari.org