

## Lisa Cataldi

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**From:** Ferdinand-King, Melaine <melaine\_ferdinand@brown.edu>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 13, 2024 3:52 PM  
**To:** House Education Committee  
**Subject:** Letter of Support - HB7724

Hello,

My name is Melaine Ferdinand-King, a 27-year old Black American woman and PhD Candidate in the Department of Africana Studies at Brown University. I write this letter in support of HB7724, also known as The Crown Act.

As a scholar of Black Studies, I've studied the centuries of discrimination against the Black body in the United States. By extension, Black hair is often a point of contention in American schools, organizations, and places of employment. As late as the 1700s, the state of Louisiana enacted the Tignon Law, mandating that women of African descent wear a headscarf over their hair to control their appearance, considered inappropriate or unkempt. Just recently in 2023, a Black boy, Darryl George, was suspended from school for wearing long natural locks, a Black American cultural hairstyle. There is a long tradition of discrimination against hair in the U.S.; one that prevents children and adults alike from receiving access to education, employment, and social resources.

In my own experience, as a woman who wears a natural or an afro, I have been subjected to interrogation, exclusion, and offensive comments about the way my hair grows out of my head. In a country where the standards of beauty and grooming are established around the white body, particularly those with straight hair, people with curly or kinky hair are treated unequally, deemed unattractive, and our hair regarded as a distraction, unhygienic, disorderly, or an aberration. Black hair in particular has continuously been ridiculed and misunderstood by the mainstream population. Black hair has been castigated into being hidden from sight - including cut, flat-ironed, or shaved completely to avoid shame or embarrassment from those who seek to reinforce racial and social hierarchies.

I am in support of HB7724 because I am against discrimination in all forms, and in this case, against the discrimination of people based on hair texture, color, or style. Without this bill's passing, there is no protection of people from texturism, which affects us all in Rhode Island, and unjustly favors people with straight hair, those who live up to the country's normative standards of appropriate American appearance and presentation. As I continue my work as a woman in the academic and art worlds, I fear for my career and whether I will be hired as a Black woman with an afro, in a society where afros are often deemed unprofessional and unclean by people with privilege whose hair is different. I worry about my safety as I walk the streets at night, anxious about the way my body is perceived in public and whether I will be subject to attack.

I urge you to support this bill on behalf of those who have experienced hair-based discrimination first-hand.

Melaine Ferdinand-King

Warmest Regards,

### **Melaine Ferdinand-King**

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Curator I Providence Biennial for Contemporary Art  
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