



# State of Rhode Island COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

180 Westminster Street, Providence, RI 02903 – Tel. 401-222-2661

---

## TESTIMONY

BILL NO.: 2024 H 7724  
BILL TITLE: An Act Relating to Education – Offenses Pertaining to Schools  
PRIMARY SPONSOR: Representative Brianna Henries  
COMMITTEE: House Education  
DATE: 3/13/2024

*The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights (“Commission”) supports this bill.*

The Commission is the state’s primary antidiscrimination law enforcement agency charged with investigating allegations of discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit and delivery of services. Among the laws over which the Commission has jurisdiction is the Fair Employment Practices Act, Title 28, Chapter 5 of the General Laws of Rhode Island (hereafter referred to as the “FEPA”).

This bill seeks to amend the FEPA, the Rhode Island Civil Rights Act of 1990 and R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-38-1 to define “Race” as including traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles such as braids, locs and twists. Twenty-three other states, including California, New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut, have already passed similar legislation into law.<sup>1</sup>

A 2019 study by the Dove company found that Black women were disproportionately burdened by workplace policies and practices that single them out for natural hair styles—referring to the texture of hair that is not permed, dyed, relaxed or chemically altered. The study found that Black women are 1.5 times more likely to be sent home from the workplace because of their hair, 30% more likely to be made aware of a formal workplace appearance policy and 3.4 times more likely to have their hair viewed as unprofessional. The study also found that Black women are 80% more likely to feel they have to change their hair from its natural state to “fit in” at the office and 83% more likely to report being judged more harshly on their looks than other women.<sup>2</sup> A follow-up study in 2023 produced similar findings. Among them, 66% of Black women change their hair

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thecrownact.com/about>

<sup>2</sup> Dove, The CROWN Research Study, 2019.

for a job interview, and over 20% of Black women aged 25-34 have been sent home from work because of their hair.<sup>3</sup>

Black students have faced similar discrimination in schools.<sup>4</sup> Another study by the Dove company found that 66% of Black girls in majority-white schools reported experiencing race-based hair discrimination.<sup>5</sup> This bill seeks to address the disparities highlighted by these studies.

The Commission believes this bill would create more equitable workplaces and schools in Rhode Island by explicitly prohibiting discrimination based on hairstyles and other traits historically linked to a particular race. Therefore, the Commission urges passage of this bill.

**Commission Contact: Michael D. Évora, Esq., Executive Director, 222-7561**

---

<sup>3</sup> Dove, CROWN 2023 Workplace Research Study.

<sup>4</sup> For a few examples of students affected by this type of discrimination, see the following articles:

<https://www.npr.org/2023/09/22/1200374764/crown-act-texas-hairstyles-law-nationwide>

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/08/us/black-hair-discrimination-schools-trnd/index.html?form=MY01SV&OCID=MY01SV>;

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/10/14/black-hair-laws-passed-stop-natural-hair-discrimination-across-us/3850402002/#>;

<sup>5</sup> Dove, Dove CROWN Research Study for Girls, 2021.