

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Dear House Education Committee Members:

My name is Nicole Tingle, a native Rhode Islander, current North Providence resident and registered voter. I serve as 1st Vice President of the NAACP Providence Branch and Political Action Chair of the Rhode Island Coalition of Black Women. I am writing in support of HB7724 an act that would prohibit discrimination on the basis of race by expanding the definition of race to include characteristics such as hair, hair texture, and protective styles.

This act will work to protect those affected by race-based hair discrimination in their schools and workplaces. Currently 22+ states have signed The Crown Act into law including Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine. The Crown Act stands for "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair". Quite often, Black people are taught to assimilate to societal standards in order to advance in both their academic and professional careers. This is particularly true for Black women like me.

As a Black woman born and raised in Rhode Island, I can attest to these societal pressure and microaggressions that I've experienced in the workplace and in the classroom. I was conditioned by my family to assimilate to European beauty standards in order for social and economic advancement. One form of assimilation included straightening and relaxing my hair at a young age to avoid being teased at school. This is also a practice that carries over into adulthood to secure economic opportunities.

As long as systemic racism is living and well, hair discrimination will continue. Students should not have to be suspended indefinitely from school for refusing to cut off their locs and expelled from their schools for it (Arnold Family v. Barbers Hill Independent School District). Employers should not be able to refuse to hire a qualified candidate because they wear dreadlocks and refuse to conform. (EEOC V. Catastrophe Management Solutions).

In conclusion, I ask that you support HB7724 to ensure that Rhode Islanders will be able to build their academic and professional careers with the policy protections in place to avoid hair discrimination. I trust that you will do the right thing.

Sincerely,

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