

Testimony of Pamela C. Hughes
In Support of House Bill 7724 – AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- OFFENSES PERTAINING TO
SCHOOLS -- THE CROWN ACT

Chairman McNamara and members of the House Committee on Education
Rhode Island General Assembly
RI State House
Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

March 13, 2024

My name is Pamela C. Hughes and I live in Providence, RI and I stand in support of House Bill 7724- AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- OFFENSES PERTAINING TO SCHOOLS. A policy that would further define the terms "race and ethnicity" to include ancestry, color, ethnic group identification, and ethnic background and is inclusive of traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles. The CROWN Act, which stands for Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair has been passed into law in over 19 states including our neighbors Massachusetts and Connecticut.

I am a Black woman and currently it is legal in Rhode Island to discriminate against a person in the workplace, schools, and/or pools because of their natural or protective hairstyle. Hair discrimination remains a source of racial injustice with serious economic consequences for Black people. The CROWN Act/H7724 corrects these racial injustices by making hair discrimination illegal. The CROWN Act is a legislative priority for me and my community. The community plans to advocate and support the passage of House Bill 7724. This legislation will ensure that traits historically associated with race, such as hair texture and hairstyles, are protected from discrimination in the workplace and in K-12 public and charter schools.

In Rhode Island, it does not currently afford protection from race-based hair discrimination, even if the hairstyle is inherent to racial identity. That means, Black women can be denied opportunities for employment or professional advancement without consequence. It means Black children can be denied entry to school or educational opportunities because of their natural hair.

Therefore, I am in full support of House Bill 7724 and respectfully ask for your Yes vote.

Sincerely,

Pamela C. Hughes
Providence, RI