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**Dear Chair McNamara and Members of the House Education Committee:**

My name is Denise A. Barge, and I am from Providence, RI. I am the Chair of the Economic Empowerment Committee of the Rhode Island Coalition of Black Women.

I am testifying in support of **The Crown Act (H 5841)**, sponsored by Representative Stewart, which would expand the definition of discrimination on the basis of race to include hair texture.

I have experienced discrimination or have known several co-workers during my many years of employment in the corporate workplace. Judgment, isolation, and disrespect have resulted from hair being worn naturally or braided or even bald, if not considered within “corporate” standards. Regardless of how hair is worn, African-Americans and other people of color have taken great pride in their hair and hair styles, yet have been condemned and labeled unprofessional. Black women’s hair is 3 times more likely to be seen as unprofessional and inappropriate in the workplace than her non-Black counterparts. This type of attitude can be in the form of microaggressions and often have a negative impact on career development and promotion. Unfortunately, many Black Women have suffered under these uncomfortable circumstances for decades and even more so now that more natural styles are being worn, at home and work.

No person should be judged or punished for how they choose to wear their hair. Race identity often includes hair style choices with a variety of textures. Hair choices should not be assumed separate and optional but rather left to the individual to decide what works best.

I strongly support The Crown Act, and I urge the committee and all legislators to vote favorably in support.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Denise A. Barge  
69 Arbor Dr.  
Providence, RI 02908