

To: Chair Joseph M. McNamara
Members of the RI House Education Committee

From: **Dr. Michael Brodeur, Psy.D. (Resident of District 18, Cranston, RI)**

Date: April 8th, 2025

Re: **Support for House Bill 5841**

I am writing to express my **strong support for expanding the definition of race to include protections for students for hair texture and hairstyles.**

My name is Dr. Michael Brodeur, and I am a clinical psychologist in Providence. As a psychologist, I often work with clients from historically excluded and underrepresented communities. I've seen the detrimental psychological impact that it has on clients who were treated differently because of their self-expression in hair texture, length, styling, and product use. **Research has shown that Black children often harsher disciplinary actions in school for their hair expression, and that many of their classmates may bully and harass them based on their hair texture, length, product use, and expression.**¹ This type of racial harassment from peers and school administrators can increase the risk of depression and social isolation.

As a white man, I have never had to face any judgment or scolding from others about how I style my hair, and it's relatively easy for me to find beauty products and beauty models that represent my skin tone and hair styling. This is not the case for many people from minoritized communities. People of color often struggle to find products that match their hair, and many of the products at retail shops depict white people or people with a lighter skin tone as the ideal beauty standard. **The enforcement and norming of white beauty standards for everyone is just another form of white supremacy towards Black and Indigenous communities** (i.e., removing people's names, language, and hair styles at Indigenous Boarding Schools, etc.).

H5841 has the power to not only end the harmful practice of hair-discrimination, but it also has the power to help children take a positive step in advancing their racial/ethnic identity development and appreciation of their cultural heritage. Whenever people can express their culture openly and freely without punishment or judgment by others, this has a significant effect on improving self-esteem, establishing community with others, and showcasing and teaching others about their cultural heritage.² Children from minoritized communities need more spaces to celebrate their heritage, and **H5841 provides a clear message that hair expressions of all types are worthy of celebration and respect.**

I urge you to **support House Bill 5841** and protect students from unfair and harmful discrimination for hair textures and hair styling.

Sincerely,



Michael Brodeur, Psy.D.
Clinical Psychologist (RI# PS01356)

¹ Mbilishaka, A. M., Clemons, K., Hudlin, M., Warner, C., & Jones, D. (2020). Don't get it twisted: Untangling the psychology of hair discrimination within Black communities. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 90(5), 590–599.

² Onnie Rogers, L., Versey, H. S., & Cielto, J. (2022). "They're always gonna notice my natural hair": Identity, intersectionality and resistance among Black girls. *Qualitative Psychology*, 9(3), 211–231.