

Jennifer Lima  
H5841  
Support

I am writing today in support of H5841 which would prohibit discrimination on the basis of race by expanding the definition of race to include traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protected hairstyles.

The impact of hair discrimination cannot be overstated. Schools and workplaces across the country often have dress codes and grooming policies in place prohibiting natural hairstyles, like afros, braids, bantu knots, and locs. These policies that criminalize natural hair have been used to justify the removal of Black children from classrooms, and adults from their employment.

Hair discrimination impacts K-12 students in a variety of ways. Examples include: students receiving detentions and suspensions for violating school dress codes which prohibit wearing hair in braids with extensions or other natural hair styles; student- athletes who are unable to participate in sports unless they cut or change their hair; and displays that show images of Black children, including Black girls with braids, and label those hairstyles as “inappropriate.”

Hair discrimination is rooted in systemic racism and erodes trust between students and the education system that is supposed to care for them. Protective styles, locs, headwraps, and durags are not just vital to the protection of Black hair, they are expressions of culture and identity. Discriminating against Black hair reinforces the othering of Black children and is another way that Black identity is policed.

Rhode Island should join the 27 other states including Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire that have enacted laws banning hair based discrimination.

Please note that I am currently a member of the school committee in North Kingstown but I am writing as a citizen, not as a member of that body. Thank you.

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