

April 8, 2025

Dear Chair McNamara and House Education Committee Members:

My name is Nicole Tingle. I am a native Rhode Islander, current Providence resident, and registered voter. I serve as the Political Action Chair of the Rhode Island Coalition of Black Women (RICBW) and Interim President of the Providence Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

I am writing in support of The Crown Act (H5841), sponsored by Representative Stewart. This act would expand the definition of discrimination on the basis of race to include hair texture.

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 women like me.

As a Black woman born and raised in Rhode Island, I can personally attest to the societal pressures and microaggressions that persist in our schools and workplaces. From an early age, I was encouraged to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards, believing that straightened hair would open doors to academic achievement and future career success. Like many Black girls, I underwent chemical hair relaxing treatments in an effort to "fit in" and avoid ridicule. This practice often continues into adulthood, where Black professionals may feel compelled to maintain straightened hair to appear more "professional" or to mitigate bias in hiring and promotion processes.

This is not simply a matter of personal grooming. It is a deeply rooted systemic issue in our country. A Black woman's hair is 3.4 times more likely to be seen as unprofessional and 1.5 times more likely to be sent home from the workplace because of their hair. To expand on the danger of conforming to eurocentric texurism for academic and professional advancement through the method of hair relaxers as an example, hair relaxers, aggressively marketed to Black women and

girls, have been linked to serious health risks, including scalp burns, fibroids, and reproductive cancers. Major corporations like Soft Sheen-Carson LLC have faced lawsuits for failing to adequately disclose these dangers. The NAACP's involvement in holding these companies accountable signals how widespread and urgent this issue is.

No student or professional in Rhode Island should feel pressured to alter their natural hair texture to avoid discrimination or gain educational or economic opportunities. As leaders, we must foster environments in our schools, workplaces, and public institutions that affirm and protect individuals' rights to wear their natural hair without fear of stigma or harm.

As long as systemic racism is alive 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, embracing their identity and heritage and refusing to conform. (EEOC V. Catastrophe Management Solutions).

In conclusion, I ask that you support H5841 to ensure that Rhode Islanders can 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,  
Nicole Tingle