

February 28, 2020

The Health & Government Operations Committee
Maryland General Assembly
House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Hearing
3/6

Dear Distinguished Committee Members:

My name is Chrissy M. Thornton. I am member of the Greater Baltimore County Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc. I am writing in support of Senate Bill 531/House Bill 1444.

Anti-black hair sentiment in the U.S. has existed for centuries with Eurocentric norms of beauty being the benchmark. This sentiment is directly tied to institutional racism. Natural styles worn by African-Americans remain the target of scorn based on long-held stereotypes that natural Black hair is unkempt and unprofessional. Black students have been asked to cut or straighten their hair to meet dress code policies. Some school districts have banned certain hairstyles, like locks and afros, while other districts have prevented students from attending school event, such as proms, for refusing to remove their braids. School administrators and dress codes also often restrict Black natural hairstyles without any consideration for the racial origins and bias involved in the drafting of the policies.

Because of recent incidents of discrimination such as: Andrew Johnson being forced to cut his hair to compete in a wrestling match and DeAndre Arnold being denied his right to graduate from his high school due to his choice to wear his hair in a natural style of his choosing, I know that discrimination can occur in the work place. Modern-day racial discrimination is not as overt as it was 40 years ago. The vitality of Title VII depends on its ability to root out more subtle practices, facially neutral policies, racial proxies, and stereotyped thinking that still operate to disfavor applicants based on their race.

As it was determined when California passed the CROWN Act, professionalism was, and still is, closely linked to European features and mannerisms, which entails that those who do not naturally fall into Eurocentric norms must alter their appearances, sometimes drastically and permanently, in order to be deemed professional. Continuing to enforce a Eurocentric image of professionalism through purportedly race-neutral grooming policies that disparately impact Black individuals and exclude them from some workplaces is in direct opposition to equity and opportunity for all. Therefore, I urge this committee to follow the lead of states such as: California, New York, and New Jersey, as well as, local governments including Montgomery County, Maryland and Cincinnati, Ohio in determining that natural hair is a characteristic of race in which a person should be protected from discrimination. I ask that you support the passage of SB531/HB1444.

Sincerely,



Chrissy M. Thornton