

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Verona Douglas. I am testifying in favor of **House Bill 1444** introduced by Delegate Stephanie Smith. I first heard of this bill last week while I was driving home. The radio was on 98.9 FM. I was touched by the subject of hair discrimination, as it is something that has affected my family firsthand.

My son Domonick Robertson was only 5 years old when he wanted to have dread locks. I asked him “do you understand what having dreads means”. His words were shocking. He said “Yes. Mommy you are from Jamaica my Dad is an African American, so I wanted to embrace my heritage”. I talked with his dad about the idea to which he allowed and my son started the process of growing dreads.

At the tender age of 8, while in the 3rd grade at Mathew Henson Elementary School, my son would come home and complain about the children pulling his hair and fighting him. He was often bullied and traumatized because of his hair style and texture. Eventually, in an act of upset and hurt my son asked his father to cut off his hair and discontinue his education at Mathew Henson Elementary? At this time, I asked the principle to have social workers in the school talking with the students on culture and diversity. Domonick was disappointed that his life had to change. He was stripped of his heritage it broke my heart.

At 9 years old Domonick sent a CD to president Obama, to which the President responded with support for what Domonick is standing up for. The name of his CD is “*Enjoying Life*” detailing his experience having his joy, sense of self and culture stripped away from him.

When Domonick was 13 he went into a deep depression, for which his father and I got him mental health treatment. After this time, he asked us to write a book about this life. We titled the book “*Celebrate the Life and Memories of a Child*”.

Domonick is now 21 years old. I still have his locks after all these years. This year, he wants to change his name to his grandfather’s name, for which he feels will strengthen his connection to his culture and heritage. I have tears in my eyes while writing his letter of support.

Please support his bill in honor of so many people from the Caribbean and other cultures.

Thank you,

Verona Douglas