



**State Representative Juanita Brent
22nd House District**

Sponsor Testimony - House Bill 178

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and the members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of House Bill 178, the "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act."

The C.R.O.W.N. Act prevents public K-12 schools and preschools from discriminating against students based on race. This includes banning discrimination based on characteristics like hair texture and protective hairstyles such as braids, locks, and twists.

In schools, students are facing unfair punishments and unequal treatment from teachers and classmates. In 2020, six-year-old Aston Johnson had to leave Zion Temple Christian Academy in Cincinnati because his dreadlocks were considered unacceptable. Similarly, in 2017, fourteen-year-old Malachi Wattley was expelled from Central Catholic High School in Toledo for the same reason.

These incidents highlight the urgent need to ensure that our schools can see and care for our students for who they are. This is just Step 1 for Ohio's schools to adopt policies that celebrate diversity and foster inclusivity. Educational institutions need to recognize the cultural significance of hairstyles and understand that enforcing uniformity isolates and marginalizes students.

The C.R.O.W.N. Act also allows students who believe that a public school or preschool has mistreated them because of their race to take legal action in any suitable court.

The places meant to support our students are hurting their confidence and self-worth. Hairstyles that are seen as “unprofessional” are part of their identity. Protective hairstyles, like braids, locks, and twists, are everyday in the African American community, are essential for keeping hair healthy, and are a vital part of cultural identity.

This is not just about Black students; Ohio is filled with students of every culture and race who express themselves in thousands of different ways. We cannot continue punishing them for the diversity we want in Ohio.

House Bill 178 ensures that our students are treated equally regardless of physical traits. I respectfully ask for this Committee to support House Bill 178. I am willing to address any questions you may have. Thank you.