

Senator Hicks Hudson
District 11



Senator Ingram
District 9

Sponsor Testimony Government Oversight Committee – 4-24-2024

Chair Roegner, Vice-chair Antani, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for allowing me to give sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 204. To my joint-sponsor, Senator Ingram and I, The CROWN Act, matters because no person should be discriminated against based on their physical appearance. The texture and style of a person's hair is not an indication of a person's professionalism, aptitude, or intellect. Yet it continues to limit the ability of some individuals to pursue their goals.

When I first introduced the CROWN Act in the 133rd GA the family of a young man in my district, Malachi Wattley, had been removed from school for wearing his hair in dreadlocks. He chose to wear this style because it represented his Caribbean roots. The school's student handbook had banned this hair style and when the student and his family refused to cut his hair, the school intended to remove not just him but his sister as well, even though she did not wear a style that violated the handbook. This family was discriminated against for celebrating their heritage in a personal, non-disruptive way.

This young man ended up leaving that school to attend TPS Aerospace & Natural Science Academy of Toledo. His hairstyle did not keep him from being successful there and gaining his pilot's license before he graduated. A young man that was clearly intelligent and hardworking should not have been threatened with expulsion from his school because of a hairstyle.

There are too many of these stories, many that may go unheard and have for far too long. So far, 23 states and numerous cities have enacted legislation to prohibit discrimination based on racial characteristics like hair. These states have recognized the social and economic impact that this kind of bias has on people of color. When children face discrimination like Malachi did, they can grow to be less confident and more self-conscious about their natural appearance. Young girls especially bear the brunt of this bias. 100% of black girls and mothers responding to the 2021 Down CROWN Research Study for Girls had experienced hair discrimination by the age of 10 with 32% stating that negative comments about their hair made them feel bad about themselves.

This follows these young women into their adult lives. The 2023 Dove CROWN Workplace Research study revealed that a black woman's natural hair is 2.5 times more likely to be seen as unprofessional and that 54% of the respondents felt they needed to straighten their natural hair to be successful in job interviews. Do we want Ohio to be a state where qualified candidates have to worry about changing the texture and style of their hair to receive fair and equal consideration?

Ohio must join with the other 23 states that have acted to promote acceptance and understanding of our individuality and our different cultural heritages. Creating an Open World for Natural Hair creates an open world for fairness, equality, acceptance and community. We urge you to support and pass this legislation that makes Ohio a more inclusive place to live, work, and raise a family. Thank you for allowing me to give sponsor testimony, I am ready to answer any questions.