

Proponent Testimony on H.B. 415 – The CROWN Act

Before the Ohio House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

October 13, 2025

Chair Fowler-Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Brennan, and members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 415, the CROWN Act. I am Andrea White, and I am a parent of two Black children who attend Ohio public schools (9th grade & 12th grade). I am also a lifespan developmental psychologist with expertise in identity development during adolescence and am a career educator.

I support H.B. 415 because students flourish when they are able to be fully themselves in school. For Black children and others with textured hair, being “themselves” often means wearing natural hair and protective styles, (e.g., braids, locks, twists) that are healthy, expressive, and culturally significant. Unfortunately, students have too often been disciplined, excluded, or humiliated because of these styles, including well-publicized cases here in Ohio and everyday incidents heard only at night as a mother tucks in her child. These incidents may seem small, but they carry lifelong consequences for a young person’s sense of belonging, confidence, and identity.

As both a parent and a developmental psychologist, I know that adolescence is a critical period for forming identity and self-worth. When a child is told that their natural hair is “unprofessional” or “distracting,” they internalize a message that who they are is not acceptable. Schools should be among the safest places for identity exploration and affirmation, not a source of shame, exclusion or anxiety about appearance.

While this bill appropriately covers public preschools and K–12 schools, I encourage the committee to extend these protections to *all* educational institutions that receive public funding, including **private schools that accept vouchers**. Public dollars should not support institutions that engage in race-based appearance discrimination.

I also strongly urge the committee to include **head scarves and wraps** within the bill’s protections. These coverings are often cultural expressions, but they also serve practical purposes in caring for textured hair. Children and adolescents frequently wear wraps or scarves between hairstyles, or to protect hair overnight or during or after physical activity. These practices are part of normal, healthy grooming for many Black families. Requiring students to remove them or claim a “religious exemption” to wear them imposes unnecessary stigma on everyday cultural and protective practices and a burden to families who are trying to care for their children’s hair in a way that is practical, culturally affirming, and respectful of their child’s individuality.

Finally, I hope the CROWN Act’s principles will eventually be extended beyond education to workplaces across Ohio. Hair-based discrimination does not end with graduation. Protecting

employees' right to wear their natural hair or cultural head coverings would affirm Ohio's broader commitment to equity and respect.

Passing H.B. 415 is an important step toward ensuring that every Ohio student can learn without having to compromise their identity, culture, or self-respect. I urge you to pass this bill and to consider strengthening it so that it protects all who learn and work in publicly supported environments.

Thank you for your time and for your service to the people of Ohio.

Sincerely,

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