

Juanita Brent
State Representative
12th House District

Sponsor Testimony – House Bill 535

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and the members of the Civil Justice Committee. Thank you for permitting me the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 535. This legislation which is known as the “Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act” is aimed at banning discriminatory policies and practices that are based upon natural hair textures and styles.

In institutions of education across the country a disproportionate amount of students are subjected to discrimination within their learning environments on a daily basis. Protective hair styles typically worn within the African American community such as braids, locks, and twists are commonly viewed as “unprofessional”. The appearances of our children are policed in the very spaces that are dedicated to instilling education to them. Inevitably these practices contribute to the creation of environments that are neither comfortable nor conducive to the education of our youth. As a result schools are not achieving the racial and ethnic balances reflective of the communities they serve. Discrimination of any kind is unacceptable and immoral and I refuse to subject our children to this any longer.

Dove has recently conducted a number of research surveys in regards to this matter of injustice to find that the implications of these practices in schools has a tangible social and economic impact on Black women disproportionately. In addition more than 80% of African American women have felt the need to adjust their hair style, often by straightening their natural textures, to conform to what is deemed “acceptable” within society. As a result, Dove has partnered with more than sixty organizations to create an alliance entitled the CROWN coalition that is dedicated to inclusion, racial equity, and prohibiting this racial injustice.

Thus the CROWN act is a common sense bill that aims to eliminate the many unconscious biases that hold communities of color from advancing within schools which ultimately affects their long term careers. Students will no longer be penalized for simply wearing braids to class. As of today, the CROWN act has pending legislation in approximately twenty states that have realized this is a matter of importance for our students. It is time for Ohio to get on board.

In closing, House Bill 535 is legislation aimed at making sure that we are ALL able to live the American Dream. The way you choose to style your hair should not limit your pursuit of this reality. Ohioans should be able to comfortably live, work, thrive, and retire here. We work for you and that means taking on discrimination in every space that is prevalent. This is our Ohio Promise and how we plan to work to make this promise a reality for each and every constituent.

I respectfully ask for this Committee's support on House Bill 535 and at this time I am willing to address any questions you may have. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Juanita Brent
State Representative of Ohio District 12