



Representatives Jamie Callender

Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 178, Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair Act
House Civil Justice Committee
June 6, 2023

Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Galonski, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on HB 178, the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair, or CROWN, act.

In 2017, Malachia Wattley was forced out of his high school in Toledo for wearing dreadlocks. In 2020, Asten Johnson was told he was not able to return to his elementary school in Cincinnati because of his dreadlocks. In 2022, two students in Australia were banned from attending school due to having mullets. What message does this send to students about their school's priorities? What damage does this do to their confidence and self-image? This issue extends beyond the school yard. According to the 2023 Workplace Research Study, jointly commissioned by Dove and LinkedIn, over 20% of black women between the ages of 25-34 report being sent home from work because of their hair styles. We are constantly hearing stories about how social media, reality TV, and other media sources are impacting children and young adult's self-image. Your employer should not be counted among those stressors based on how you wear your hair.

It is situations like these that prompted the introduction of HB 668 in the 134th General Assembly by Representatives Hicks-Hudson and Brent and its reintroduction this General Assembly by Representative Brent and myself. Students should be focused on their studies, working professionals should be focused on building their career, not worried about how their hair style impacts their ability to learn or grow in their field.

Ohio is not alone in seeking to pass the CROWN act, with Texas last week joining 19 other states in having already enacted or signed a version of the CROWN act and there was an effort in the 117th Congress to enshrine these protections for natural hair styles in federal law. HR 2116 (117th Congress) passed the US House of Representatives with bipartisan support.

It is for the above reasons and many more that Ohio should pass the CROWN act. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We look forward to any questions you may have.