

# Labor and Public Employees Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6376

AN ACT CREATING A RESPECTFUL AND OPEN WORLD FOR NATURAL

**Title:** HAIR.

**Vote Date:** 2/18/2021

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/9/2021

**File No.:**

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### **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Labor and Public Employees Committee

### **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Some employers are excluding potential employees with natural hair from consideration when hiring. There has been harassment and discrimination because of hairstyle choices in schools and the workplace.

### **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

#### **[VANNESSA DORANTES, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.](#)**

She shared her personal experiences and the impact of implicit bias she faced throughout her life. Implicit bias is subconscious and results in judgements that happen instantly. Implicit bias is more deliberate when a person chooses to discriminate against someone on the basis of race, color or creed; this bill would prohibit specific acts of implicit bias that manifests in hiring decisions and employee grooming policy restrictions that impact a person's livelihood. There are instances where black children were ostracized, bullied, disciplined unjustly or forced to acquiesce and assimilate to handbook rules that exclude specific natural hair styles. This legislation is a step in the right direction, but true equality is the eradication of the underlying racism that makes it necessary in the first place.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **BRIAN ANDERSON, LEGISLATIVE COORDINATOR, COUNCIL 4, AFSCME**

Some people from statutorily protected classes may prefer hairstyles that do not fit the norm for the societal majority group; there has been a case documented where a high school wrestler was forced to forfeit a match because of his hairstyle. Discrimination against people because of their hairstyle choice is wrong.

### **LISA ANDREWS, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC POLICY, CT COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

No one should be discriminated against in the workplace or school because of their natural hairstyle. This is a common occurrence in a society built upon a systemic oppression of communities of color. Black women's hair is 3X more likely to be perceived as unprofessional. They are 30% more likely to be made aware of formal workplace appearance policies and 80% more likely to change their natural hair to fit in at the office. Seven states have passed "THE CROWN ACT". CT's proposal ensures protection against discrimination based on hairstyles by specifying the protected class of race, including traits historically associated with race identification, such as texture and style. This bill will draw attention to culture and racial sensitivity in the workplace grooming policies extending beyond hair.

### **EVA BERMUDEZ ZIMMERMAN, ORGANIZING DIRECTOR, CSEA SEIU LOCAL 2001**

She told of her personal experiences as a young woman experimenting/exploring with hairstyles, relaxers and straightening. It was a teacher's remark that made her aware of the discrimination. Even today, different hair is taboo in the workforce. It is a perpetual cycle that faces young black and brown people and forces them to suppress some natural and essential elements of their identity. To succeed, they must give up and sacrifice their identity and deny a part of their self-awareness. This bill empowers women and men to embrace their heritage and choose the way they want to wear their hair.

### **CHRISTOPHER BIDORINI, DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL ACTION, DELTA PI SIGMA CHAPTER, PHI BETA SIGMA FRATERNITY PASTOR ASHLEY J. JOHNSON, PRESIDENT**

Through membership, scholarships and community support, their fraternity strives to help raise strong, independent and successful members only to have them face feelings of discrimination and inferiority for not conforming to the Eurocentric standard of beauty and professionalism. America has attempted to strip the Black community of their culture and heritage. If this bill is not passed, racial discrimination and forced cultural conformity will continue.

### **ORLENA NWOKAH BLANCHARD, PRESIDENT, JOY COLLECTIVE**

This topic is not new. Many people have spent years fighting for racial equality. Hair is a racial characteristic that invokes bias and discriminatory behavior in our society. As an African immigrant here for over 35 years, she has spent countless hours putting toxic chemicals and manipulating her hair to appear in a way she believed was beautiful and acceptable. It was a long and painful journey and she is encouraged that CT will allow a more respectful and open world for black men, women and children.

### **NAKITTA BROWN, NEW HAVEN RESIDENT**

Her testimony said she has attended mostly white schools and her classmates loved her hairstyles. As she grew older, she went the whole route of relaxers, then finally went back to natural. Her hair is now healthy and strong. Hair does not determine professionalism. People of color should not have to always conform to what white society believes is proper. Hair is an expression of heritage and in no way does it reflect ability.

### **COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Certain hairstyles are often equated with race or ethnicity which has historically led to separate and unequal treatment. Dress codes often have a disparate impact on black applicants and employees. This bill makes it clear that discrimination on the basis of an individual's protective hair style or texture is a form of race discrimination.

### **ASHLEY COLLINS, HARTFORD RESIDENT**

Throughout history, Black women have had to fight the constant battle of appealing to Eurocentric beauty standards. There was a time when they were even forced to wear headwraps to hide their hair. They were forced to adjust themselves because white counterparts were offended. Hair does not define a person and should not block access to educational and employment opportunities. Let us take a stand to assure that people's hair does not define who they are or how far they can go.

### **ERIN CROSBY, DIRECTOR OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND RACIAL JUSTICE, YWCA, GREENWICH**

She told of her experiences of growing up in the South and attending White schools. It was very painful both physically and mentally to try to fit with what was thought to be beautiful. After moving to Boston, she was inspired by a friend who wore her hair natural and followed her example for the rest of her life. No person of color should have to wonder about, struggle with or acquiesce about wearing their natural hair. Hair bias is rooted in racism and damages black peoples' sense of identity. Passing this act is an act of repair that ensures and protects diversity.

### **VERONICA DeLANDRO, VID CONSULTING GROUP, NEW BRITAIN**

Often Black women feel a burden to disguise their hair for fear of being the butt of a joke. Why does hair matter? The Dove/Crown Research Act study showed black women's hair is more likely to be perceived as unprofessional. Black women are more likely to be made aware of a formal workplace dress code and more likely to be sent home because of their hair. Black women feel their hair is targeted and are constantly rated as less ready for job promotions. This bill is needed.

### **ANDREA DUZAK-FORESTER, HARTFORD RESIDENT**

People should be free to wear their hair in styles of their choosing, especially regarding styles that are historic and/or natural such as "afros", braids, or dreadlocks. No one should ever fear that a style that highlights their natural hair, has historical significance, or helps to ease day to day care of one's natural hair could be used to determine employment any more than a religious head covering could.

**TERRY FITZGERALD, ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR, YWCA, HARTFORD REGION**

It is unfair to ask people of color to change their natural hair to 'fit in' or to hold people to a Eurocentric standard. Seven states have already passed the CROWN ACT. CT should be next.

**CLAUDINE FOX, INTERIM PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY DIRECTOR, AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF CONNECTICUT**

In order to create an equitable world, racism in all forms must be addressed. Discrimination against natural hair and protective hairstyles is racial discrimination. This bill expands the definition of racial discrimination to make it clear that natural hair discrimination is also racial discrimination. Expanding the definition will allow the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities to investigate and adjudicate hair bias and racial discrimination in many areas.

**MADELINE GRANATO, POLICY DIRECTOR, CONNECTICUT WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND LEGAL FUND**

Women of color are disproportionately judged and face racial discrimination on the basis of their natural hair. This has a long-lasting impact on a person's health and well-being. The term 'nappy' was used by masters who described what was undesirable to their culture. There was a court case in 2016 where an employer rescinded a job offer in Alabama because the applicant refused to cut her locks. She sued....and lost. The claim was dismissed. This led to the US Supreme Court of Appeals decision that stated hairstyles have only a cultural link to race. This bill specifies the protected class of race and also includes traits historically associated with race discrimination, such as texture and style. Passage of this bill is crucial because it ensures women and girls are treated fairly and respectfully to obtain equitable education and achieve economic security in the workplace.

**AMY HAWKINS, SUFFIELD RESIDENT**

Ms. Hawkins testimony told of her childhood when she was teased mercilessly about her hair. Her classmates called her "Fro", short for afro. European standards of beauty are narrow and confusing. It is outrageous and oppressive to impose them on black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), especially when it can impact someone's employment or education.

**NEIL & ANNIE HORNISH, MEMBERS, ABAR, SUFFIELD**

They are pleased the committee is considering legislation, but there is still much more to be done in the fight against the scourge of bias and racism that permeates so many Connecticut communities.

**CLAIRE HOWARD, ATTORNEY, MIDDLETOWN RESIDENT**

As a professional Black woman with natural hair, she is always aware her look is different and could cause the perception of a lack of professionalism. She represents individuals in cases for clients who were victims of discriminating comments with no legal recourse. History has shown that legal protections are necessary to catalyze behavior.

### **JORDAN JEFERSON, JD MLIS, HAMDEN, RESIDENT**

Her testimony said this bill places CT on the forefront of antiracist legislation. As a black woman who works in higher education, she has witnessed multiple aggression against colleagues whose images do not conform to European standards of beauty or professionalism. She and her colleagues expressed dismay that a deeply-rooted form of cultural expression is often devalued and disregarded. It is unfair to burden black residents with unfair standards that disregard their culture and heritage.

### **MORGAN JENNINGS, SOPHOMORE, WINDSOR HIGH SCHOOL**

Growing up, Morgan was subjected to unkind curiosity and criticism about her hair. This made her uncomfortable and feel like an animal in a petting zoo. Even staff would ask questions since they obviously didn't know the true history behind her hairstyles. It felt as if this discrimination was normal within the school and society in general. She used relaxers to the point where her hair was damaged. People complimented her, but this made her feel ashamed of her natural hair and made her feel she would never fit in. It was never good enough; job descriptions even compared dreads to tattoos and piercings. People of color should be allowed to embrace their features, culture, roots and ancestry. Passage of this bill would allow thousands of people of color to feel comfortable in their environment.

### **LATOSHA JOHNSON, HARTFORD RESIDENT**

She is a member of numerous organizations and a State employee. Growing up, the "dominant culture" set the standards for what was beautiful and appropriate. There is psychological trauma associated with being told what was approved by their standards. This is further exacerbated by the unwillingness to call this what it is.....DISCRIMINATION AND DISPARATE TREATMENT. For years, she attempted to navigate a 'natural HAIR' journey' to feel accepted. If we truly believe in diversity and equity, we must embrace natural hair.

### **MELINDA JOHNSON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY, YWCA, HARTFORD REGION**

The ugly and oppressive reality of systemic racism can be as overt as police brutality or as subtle as Eurocentric policies in educational and professional settings that subject people of color based on identity. In schools, black and brown children need to be able to hold their heads high without fear of taunting and ridicule. In the workplace, men and women need to know their hair does not outshine their accomplishments. People literally can't get ahead because they are judged, regulated and seen as less because of what grows on their head. People of color should be accepted in mainstream culture and not just tolerated as an alternative.

### **JENNIFER KLEINDIENST, MIDDLETOWN RESIDENT**

This bill will prohibit employers from enforcing purportedly "race grooming" policies that disproportionately impact persons of color. Advancing the acceptance of protective hairstyles within the corporate culture, this bill draws attention to cultural and racial sensitivity extending beyond hair.

### **TAMMY LEACH, HARTFORD RESIDENT**

Her testimony said the bill would hinder systemic ideology of what is acceptable visual professionalism. It will neutralize the practice of hair prejudice. Hairstyles should not hinder anyone from advancing and participating with the progression of society. This is an injustice that should not be allowed to continue.

### **RYAN LINDSAY ARRENDELL, FORMER JOURNALIST, HARTFORD RESIDENT**

Her family are descendants of West African people, including the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria, who were stolen and brought here where they were considered property rather than people. The dysfunctional, dis-united, disjointed states of America have never fully recognized the humanity of black people in this country. If they were fully accepted, there would not be attempts to regulate choices. As a journalist for CPR, often covering the Capitol, she would often get "side-eyed" glances and invasive gazes while doing her job. This is known as the "white gaze that traps black people in white imaginations, limitations and fetishizations." Hair is not unprofessional. It is shameful that this bill even exists.

### **SAL LUCIANO, PRESIDENT, AFL-CIO**

Natural and protective hairstyles can serve as a proxy for race, leaving the door open for employers to continue practicing racial discrimination. Those with non-European appearances feel pressured in order to find employment or to advance. They often use harmful practices and chemicals to alter the natural characteristics of their hair. This bill aims to reform the image of professionalism and bring awareness of cultural and racial sensitivity to the workplace.

### **AMANDA LUKINGBEAL, HARTLAND RESIDENT**

As a white woman, her testimony said she was "floored" hearing her black friends tell of the ongoing racist practices in the state. Of all the incredibly blatant of systemic racial bias to actually discriminate, naturally occurring hair growth has to take the proverbial cake. The absolute nerve of these people continuing this backward and blatant, racist trope... This needs to be thrown into the trash heap of history.

### **SUGELLY MACHADO, SECURITY OFFICER, AETNA INSURANCE COMPANY, HARTFORD**

In 2017, he was working at his job for about two weeks when he decided to get dreadlock extensions. After his shift, his assistant manager was waiting for him to "inspect" his hair. After admitting he found nothing wrong with it, he said "Well, it is ok for now, but if the client companies complain, you will have to take it out." He took it out that day because he didn't want to be treated differently. No one should have their personal space violated in this way. It is disrespectful to race, gender and the sense of self-worth. This should not be tolerated.

### **KELLY RICHARDSON LAWSON, CEO//FOUNDER, JOY COLLECTIVE**

Qualitative and quantitative research by DOVE uncovered the impact of black women feeling the need to change their natural hair to fit in the workplace. As a black woman with parents born in the segregated South, she spent the better part of her life using toxic chemicals and spent endless hours at the beauty shop to manipulate her hair in a way she was taught was beautiful and acceptable. It was a long and often painful journey. She is encouraged this bill will ensure an open world for her children.

### **RAY ROSSOMANDO, DIRECTOR OF POLICY, CT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

The CEA has respected and supported freedom of expression in the schools by prohibiting the discrimination of students based on hairstyles. Addressing discrimination that shapes society, as in schools and workplaces, is the key to lasting change.

### **REED SCHWARTZ, POLICY DIRECTOR, WESLEYAN DEMOCRATS**

His testimony said they strongly condemn prejudice and discrimination in all forms. This anti-racist legislation is a necessary step for moving forward toward a more inclusive Connecticut. We now have the opportunity to enforce anti-racist policy where the federal government has failed.

### **SEIU HEALTHCARE**

This bill should have passed many years ago. This added protection to the law will close the door on racial and discriminatory practices from employers that are often disguised as "professional". This bill will draw attention to cultural and racial sensitivity in the workplace. It aims to destroy the Eurocentric image of professionalism in order to ensure and protect diversity in the workforce.

### **PAMELA SELDERS, FOUNDER, CT BLACK WOMEN**

Black hair is not the problem. White supremacy/racism, specifically anti-blackness is the problem. The pressure to conform to Eurocentric hairstyles is not just impolite banter. Black women are less likely to be hired, are punished and sent home, are demoted, or terminated because of hair styles. Educational opportunities, being bullied or forced to cut their hair are examples of what black children face, not to mention the violence and humiliation.

### **SUBIRA GORDEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CONNCAN**

When students come to school, they do so with societal expectation, biases and barriers in mind. When their style or preferences aren't in congruence with the dominant culture, they may feel pressured, intimidated or ashamed of their appearance. There has been bullying through verbal and cyber means. For our young people to learn, they must feel safe. Protecting natural hair styles will signify to our young people that CT cares and appreciates them.

### **JENNIFER VALENTINO RODRIGUEZ, SUFFIELD RESIDENT**

All people face challenges obstacles and pain in their lifetimes. These are generally unavoidable. The hair we are born with should not contribute to these challenges. It seems ridiculous natural hair could keep anyone from succeeding. Ethics and morals aside, CT is constantly competing with Boston and New York to attract business. The hardworking students and workforce do not need obstacles. Remove this one.

### **SHANNON WATSON, WEST SUFFIELD RESIDENT**

She is a white woman whose testimony said she never had to think twice or worry if the style or texture of her hair would work against her. The fact that many people do is inexcusable. There is no way to legislate about feelings of racism, but we can make it harder for them to hurt our friends and family through this bill. This is a step toward building an inclusive robust and healthy society.

**ALTHEA BATES, CEO/FOUNDER, PROJECT RESILIENCY, EXECUTIVE LIFE COACH, AUTHOR, MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER, IMAGE CONSULTANT**

For 14 years, she wore her hair in natural locks. She had a newborn baby and was starting graduate school. She wanted to focus her energy on these things as well as her full time job. She had many labelings and assumptions about who she was and who she represented simply because of how she chose to wear her hair. She is testifying to assure that her daughter won't have to experience limitations on opportunities because of her hair. This is about equality of choice.

**JANEE WOODS WEBER, PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEMBER, POLITIACT**

It is sad and infuriating that in 2021, we are still forced to debate whether the hair that grows naturally on one's head is 'appropriate', professional or acceptable. Failure to pass this CROWN Act would essentially be a nod to supporting white supremacy and the deeply entrenched racist lie that Eurocentric beauty standards should be an inspiration no matter what racial or ethnic back ground. It will encourage cultural and racial sensitivity by protecting people who wear natural hairstyles that reflect their personal identity and racial heritage.

**BRITTANY YANEY, GREATER HARTFORD AMBASSADOR, UNITED STATE OF WOMEN**

Growing up, she was socialized to believe straight, non-textured hair and whiteness was the standard. She felt pressured and put chemicals in her hair for occasions such as school picture day and job interviews, among others. As an educator, she has witnessed, and been a victim, of hair discrimination and bias. Despite federal, state and local laws, courts have unfairly excluded hair from their statutes. This bill is not only about hair, it is about protecting people's rights to bodily autonomy, protecting identity and culture, and atoning for the long history of structured oppression.

**STACY ZIMMERMAN, SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION**

They support every bill on the agenda. Passage would stabilize and address both longstanding and COVID-19 related employment issues.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

No opposition testimony was submitted

**Reported by: Marie Knudsen, Assistant Clerk**

**Date: March 5, 2021**