



## **National Advocacy Groups' Joint Statement and Case Studies in Support of the Colorado CROWN Act**

The CROWN campaign and Curls on the Move are pleased to strongly support the Colorado Black Caucus, in collaboration with the Crown Coalition for the passing of the CROWN ACT in Colorado. We are an interdisciplinary team and growing village of grassroots advocates across the nation in academia, business, policy, research, health, law, the arts, and community who have lived experiences of hair discrimination and have been engaging voices from around the country on experiences with hair discrimination.

In the black community, hair and hairstyles have strong historical, political, cultural, social, and familial significance in terms of identity. Such hairstyles include afros, braids, bantu knots, locs, African thread styles, twists, fades, and leaving hair in various forms of its natural state. Unfortunately, individuals have been discriminated against on the basis of the expression of this cultural identity and practice of natural hair/hairstyles. This has resulted in a number of inequities in activities of daily living such as lack of employment opportunities, discrimination in the workplace, discrimination in school settings, job loss, microaggressions and much more. In a number of case studies, individuals have been told to conform to the dominant culture for assimilation and upward mobility further promoting racist stereotypes. There is strong research evidence on the adverse effects of different forms of discrimination on health, social determinants of health, and equity.

### **A Case for the Crown Act in Colorado**

#### **Black Hair History**

“Hair is seen as a symbol of expression for all cultures and for all hair types. However, black people, in particular black women, have a rich history with hair beginning in Africa. In the earliest African civilizations, hair was considered a cultural marker and used to indicate age, marital status, wealth, rank, and tribal affiliation. Intricate hairstyles and designs of early African civilizations are still echoed in many hairstyles of today among multicultural populations. In American society, hair has historically been used as a tool of systemic violence

against black women who have been socially penalized and stigmatized for their hair. During the middle passage, slave traders shaved the heads of new slaves and, in doing so, removed their identity of hair as a cultural marker, erasing the relationship between Africans and their hair. Later, during the colonial period, hairstyles came to represent social order among female slaves because hairstyles for house slaves differed from those for field slaves. Female house slaves donned neatly kept hair that was pinned together, a style similar to that of the slave master's wife, which was known to be well-groomed and clean. Though the hair of female field slaves was often disheveled, neglected and needed to be practical in order to withstand the brutality they endured and heat of the sun while picking cotton. The hair of field slaves and of emancipated blacks later during the Jim Crow era came to be described as wild, unkempt, messy, sweaty, knotty, dirty, and nappy. Wild, messy hair was often equated with wild behavior, signifying insanity. As a result, these words and related words such as kinky, rough, hard, bad, and ugly became synonymous with slave hair culture and became embedded in the history and vernacular of America used to this day to describe hair that is not styled, orderly, or neat" Excerpted from Research by Dr. Patricia O'Brien Richardson

Research Paper: Dr. Patricia O'Brien Richardson (2019). The Case for Hair Health in Health Education: Exploring Hair and Physical Activity Among Urban African American Girls

[http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/the\\_case\\_for\\_hair\\_health\\_in\\_health\\_education.pdf](http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/the_case_for_hair_health_in_health_education.pdf)

### **Hair discrimination can increase bullying in schools**

Dr. Patricia O'Brien Richardson, an Associate Professor at Rutgers University Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, researcher, and founder for Curls on the Move, has conducted extensive research on hair harassment and hair discrimination. Based on this research, hair harassment can be defined as the direct or indirect unwanted, unwelcomed, and offensive behavior made either explicitly or implicitly typically towards women or girls of African descent, based on the texture, look, or subjective assumptions of their hair. This also applies to males too. Dr. O'Brien Richardson makes a case for hair discrimination and hair harassment being elevated to the level of bullying which has strong protections in school policies. Not allowing kids to come to school with the cultural expression of their hair increases bullying.

Research Paper: Dr. Patricia O'Brien Richardson (2019). Hair Harassment in Urban Schools and How It Shapes the Physical Activity of Black Adolescent Girls

[http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/hair\\_harassment\\_in\\_urban\\_schools\\_and\\_how.pdf](http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/hair_harassment_in_urban_schools_and_how.pdf)

**Hair discrimination impacts educational attainment, health, and well-being (mentally, physically, and socially)**

Most recently, the CROWN campaign provided advocacy and expert testimony for two young boys (4 and 5 years old) within Tatum Texas who had been suspended from school based on expression of their natural hair. An excerpt is below on the experiences of the two young boys in this case:

“It has been brought to our attention that two children are being negatively impacted by the actions of Tatum Independent School District. In one case, a child was found by Child Protective Services isolated in a classroom away from any social contact, his grandmother has received death threats trying to protect her family with very little assistance from law enforcement. These young children, who should be playing with their friends, have instead been isolated, removed from school, and discriminated against for hair that grows naturally out of their scalp. This is a deep injustice and unacceptable. The families have faced severe primary trauma with this injustice, and, community has suffered from secondary trauma. We are concerned for them and the safety of their families. Michael’s grandmother has shared that he is unable to sleep, and is now afraid to return back to school based on how he has been treated. He and Kellen’s educational attainment is being interrupted and impacted by racism and discrimination within the school system. In the educational setting, isolating a child away from the group and in a separate room can cause emotional trauma similar to a prison sentence. These children are being criminalized for a natural and physical characteristic of their race. The grandma, and mother of these young boys have shed many tears about what they have gone through just trying to protect their son and grandson. These boys feel they have done something wrong being isolated from a Tatum ISD school education experience and friends. An injustice to one person is an injustice to us all. Racism is a social injustice. Racism impacts educational attainment. Racism impacts communities. Racism impacts employment.” Excerpted from Crown Campaign advocacy letters (Dr. Bernice B. Rumala and Shemekka Ebony Coleman)

“The early experiences that children have in the educational setting are foundational to how they think about themselves as learners, students, and members of the larger communities around them. Any experiences of discrimination at this vulnerable age can negatively affect personal development and academic trajectories, and limit the emotional benefits of early childhood education. Within the school setting, children start to develop a sense of belonging and how to interact with society by watching and observing how they are treated. The school setting can have a profound impact on the lifelong well-being of children. Therefore, a positive and supportive learning environment is paramount. Discrimination based on appearance, cultural values, can have harmful and negative ramifications for children’s sense of self, social identity and well-being. This can also cause children to internalize these negative views.” Excerpted from expert witness testimony, Dr. Bernice B. Rumala

Advocacy and Case Study reference:

Dr. Bernice B. Rumala and Shemekka Ebony Coleman (2019). Discrimination in School Grooming Policies at Tatum Independent School District

[http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/letter\\_to\\_tatum\\_isd\\_superintendent\\_3.pdf](http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/letter_to_tatum_isd_superintendent_3.pdf)

Dr. Bernice B. Rumala (2019). Expert witness testimony on discrimination in school grooming policies.

<http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/drrumalaexpertwinesstestimonydoc.pdf>

Research Reference:

Dr. Patricia O'Brien Richardson (2019). Hair Harassment in Urban Schools and How It Shapes the Physical Activity of Black Adolescent Girls

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Dr. Manka Nkimbeng (2019). Racial discrimination regardless of form impacts health outcomes across the lifespan (Presentation)

[http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/2019\\_american\\_public\\_health\\_association\\_presentation\\_racial\\_discrimination\\_across\\_life\\_span.pdf](http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/2019_american_public_health_association_presentation_racial_discrimination_across_life_span.pdf)

**Hair Discrimination impacts employment opportunities and upward mobility in the workplace**

Similarly, there are countless stories around the nation concerning discrimination in employment opportunities and upward mobility including a lawyer who was threatened with job insecurity due to her locs.

Reference: Crystal M. Richardson, Esq. (2019). A Lawyer's Point of View: Legal overview, Case Studies, and Experiences with Hair Discrimination (Presentation)

[http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/2019\\_american\\_public\\_health\\_association\\_legal\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.crowncampaign.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/124679205/2019_american_public_health_association_legal_presentation.pdf)

In conclusion, as a result of the ongoing rising cases of hair discrimination and detrimental impacts to individuals and communities, we stand with the Black Caucus and Crown Coalition in strongly supporting the CROWN Act for Colorado.

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