

Rep. Myers: Introduces CROWN Act aimed at eliminating hair discrimination in Wisconsin

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MADISON – Representative LaKeshia Myers (D-Milwaukee) introduced legislation today that will alleviate hair discrimination in the state of Wisconsin. The bill, known as The CROWN (Creating a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural hair) Act, would update Wisconsin state statutes to include protections for individuals who wear natural hairstyles predominately worn by African Americans such as afros, braids, locs, and twists.

While Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of sex, race, and color, there is no legal precedent in state or federal statute to protect individuals against discrimination based on natural hair texture and styles. By specifying in statute that the protected class of race also includes traits historically associated with racial identification, such as hair texture and protective hairstyles, this bill ensures defense against grooming policies that often affect people of color.

Myers stated, “While we cannot legislate morality, we can legislate equity and the CROWN Act is a step forward in ensuring equitable hiring and employment practices in the state of Wisconsin. After learning about legislation passed in California by State Senator Holly Mitchell (D-Los Angeles), I was inspired to introduce the CROWN Act in Wisconsin. I feel it is necessary for all people to be affirmed and accepted for who they are. As black people, our natural hair textures have often been weaponized and used as a tool of rejection when seeking or maintaining employment. Natural textures are just that—natural; it is the way one’s hair grows

from the scalp. This should not be deemed as unprofessional or used to enforce 'race neutral' grooming policies that overwhelmingly impact people of color."

Presently, federal law protects one's choice to wear an afro. Representative Myers said, "This protection was based on a federal discrimination lawsuit in 1976, afros are not the only natural hairstyles worn. It is important that our state statutes reflect the societal changes that have occurred in the last forty-three years. Updating our state statutes to end discrimination based on hair textures and protective styles will help to foster healthier, more productive, and more diverse workplace environments. It is my hope that my colleagues in both chambers will support this legislation and do what is necessary to promote equity and inclusion for all Wisconsinites."