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Media
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Twelve Civil Rights Organizations Send Letter to Texas Education Agencies Calling for Proper Enforcement of CROWN Act

Today, twelve civil rights organizations sent a letter to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas State Board of Education urging the agencies to issue detailed guidance to school districts concerning the implementation of Texas’s Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair Act (the “Texas CROWN Act”). The Texas CROWN Act became effective on September 1, 2023, and was passed to combat race-based hair discrimination in schools, workplaces, and public accommodations.

The letter highlights the fundamental role that the state’s leaders in public education play in eliminating race-based hair discrimination in schools and ensuring school dress and grooming codes adhere to the Texas CROWN Act.

Black students are more likely to be removed from class and denied educational opportunities for discretionary reasons such as dress and grooming code or hair violations, neither of which have been found to be predictive of student misconduct. The Texas CROWN Act seeks to combat these disparities.

“Every student deserves to feel safe and respected in their pursuit of learning, including being able to proudly express their identity and background,” said Patricia Okonta, LDF Assistant Counsel. “Race-based hair restrictions in dress and grooming codes, like provisions barring locs, braids, afros, or other culturally significant styles and formations, unfairly target Black, Indigenous, and other students of color for expressing pride in their heritage. Such restrictions strike at their dignity and sense of belonging. The Texas CROWN Act is instrumental in rooting out this form of discrimination. Detailed guidance on the Act will ensure that schools understand the scope and spirit of the law.”

“Discriminatory dress code discipline endured by so many Texas students — especially our Black and Brown students — must end,” said Chloe Kempf, ACLU of Texas Attorney. “We urge the state of Texas and TEA to issue guidance and ensure that all Texas school districts’ dress and grooming codes and enforcement comply with the CROWN Act. All students, no matter their race, religion, or gender, deserve the freedom to express themselves at school, free from discrimination.”

"Texas legislators ended hair discrimination with the passage of the CROWN Act,” said Angel Carroll, Director of Advocacy at MEASURE. “It’s time for the state and the Texas Education Agency to ensure immediate compliance by all school districts and squash any
attempts to circumvent the law. No more evasion – uphold the principles of equality and enforce the rights granted by this pivotal legislation."

The CROWN Act, first passed in California in 2019, aims to end the denial of employment, educational, and other opportunities because of natural hair texture and protective hairstyles. 23 states have adopted versions of the CROWN Act, including Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington, and Texas, as well as the U.S. Virgin Islands. Arizona's Governor recently signed an executive order barring hair discrimination that was inspired by the CROWN Act.

The letter was signed by a group of local and national civil rights organizations, including the Legal Defense Fund (LDF), American Civil Liberties Union of Texas (ACLU of Texas), Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Children at Risk, Children's Defense Fund – Texas, Human Rights Campaign (HRC), The Education Trust in Texas, Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), MEASURE, National Women's Law Center, Native American Rights Fund (NARF), Texas Appleseed, and Transgender Education Network of Texas.

Read the full letter here.