



COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

March 2, 2020

The Honorable Stephanie Smith
316 House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins
350 House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter in Support of HB1444, - Discrimination - Definition of Race - Hair Texture and Hairstyles

Dear Delegates Smith and Wilkins:

The Montgomery County Commission for Women (“Commission”) strongly supports HB1444 (cross-filed with SB531) and urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill. The bill takes steps towards eliminating discrimination by providing protection to those who wear natural hairstyles.

Recently, Montgomery County made history as the first County in the United States to pass legislation that bans discrimination based on hairstyles. Our 15-member Commission, which represents the interests of the women in our County, was proud to support such legislation at our County level and unanimously support this bill because we are wholeheartedly against discrimination. While this issue is not exclusive to women, it does impact a large group of women. The Commission promotes the advancement and empowerment of women, and this bill eliminates another hindrance to a woman’s advancement, economic empowerment and overall wellbeing in society when there is no fear of this type of discrimination.

On a personal level, I want to emphasize the collateral effects of this issue. From a very young age, I was conditioned to accept a certain standard for what constitutes an acceptable, professional and well-groomed appearance, especially in the workplace. For many years, I used chemical relaxers in my hair on a regular basis to achieve this particular look before I realized, like many other women, the dangers of the chemicals that we put in our hair that could eventually affect our bodies, and ultimately destroy the natural state of our hair. Although I have not used these chemicals for almost 30 years, the conditioning of standards of beauty, grooming and professionalism remain.

My daughter also recently experienced this discrimination on one of her jobs when a manager created an environment whereby African-Americans were made to feel like it was taboo to wear their hair in natural hairstyles and texture. While I was shocked that we still have this issue today, I was not entirely surprised. After all, I subscribed to that belief system for many years myself as to what is

considered an acceptable and professional hairstyle, even to the point of making judgments about a friend who did not want to cut his locks to conform to the accepted standard.

Eventually, and thankfully, I altered my thinking. I ask that the committee does the same and subscribes to a paradigm shift that allows individuals who are affected by this type of discrimination to feel comfortable, confident, and proud of the hair they were born with, to wear it in the natural state and texture, and to be free from this type of discrimination. For these reasons, the Montgomery County Commission for Women urges a favorable report on this bill.

Sincerely,



Nicole Y. Drew, Esq.
President
Montgomery County Commission for Women

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