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MAYOR

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HB 1444

March 6, 2020

TO: Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Lauron Thomas, Legislative Assistant for Government Relations

RE: House Bill 1444 - Discrimination - Definition of Race - Hair Texture and Hairstyles

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Peña-Melnyk, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 1444.

HB 1444, if enacted, would define both “race” and “protective hairstyle” for the purposes of certain non-discrimination laws. In the definitions, it defines traits to include hair texture, afro hairstyles, and protective hairstyles; it further defines “protective hairstyles” to include hairstyles such as braids, twists, and locks.

According to the BCA’s Department of Planning website,¹ as of the 2014 American Community Survey and 2015 Population Estimates from the United States Census Bureau, the City of Baltimore is home to over 621,849 residents, 62.6% of whom are black. Put another way, the City of Baltimore is home to nearly 400,000 black residents of the State of Maryland.² And while many of these City residents find their employment within the City, many others work in other counties throughout the State. HB 1444 would guarantee protection against workplace discrimination for their hairstyles, the maintenance of which often comes at a significant personal cost at the barber shop or the salon.

¹ See “BALTIMORE CITY DEMOGRAPHICS AT A GLANCE: A closer look at the composition of Baltimore City” available at http://planning.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/2a_City%20Profile%20-%20203.30.16_0.pdf (Last accessed March 5, 2020).

² *Id.*

Locally, there is similar legislation pending before the Baltimore City Council that was introduced by Councilmember Robert Stokes.³ If enacted, this council legislation would impose a similar ban against hairstyle discrimination that would apply within the limits of the City of Baltimore. However, given the realities mentioned above regarding that many Baltimore City residents find employment in Maryland jurisdictions outside of the City proper, it would benefit a greater number of City residents if a statewide law were adopted, as is the case in HB 1444.

For the foregoing reasons, we ask for a **favorable** report on HB 1444.

³ See City Council Bill 19-0841, referred to the Labor Committee with no hearing date announced; at the date of this testimony, it is unknown if or when the City Council will be announcing a hearing for this bill. Available at: <https://baltimore.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4283629&GUID=BB33358F-08BD-477D-AB37-6920C85257ED> (last accessed March 5, 2020).