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The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass
Chair of Health and Government Operations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB 1444/CROWN Act – SUPPORT

Good afternoon Chairwoman Pendergrass and distinguished members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Adjoa B. Asamoah. I am the Founder and CEO of ABA Consulting, and as an impact strategist I proudly lead the legislative advocacy efforts for the CROWN Act nationwide on behalf of the CROWN Coalition.

The CROWN Coalition is a national alliance--that was formed for the sole purpose of outlawing hair discrimination. It was cofounded by Dove, the National Urban League, and Color of Change, and Western Center on Law & Poverty, but with support from many of my personal friends who lead non-profits and NGOs, it has quickly grown considerably, to include support from several influential organizations, including Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., The Links, Inc., the National Council of Negro Women, NAACP, Alpha Kappa Sorority, Inc., Black Women's Roundtable, Association of Black Psychologists, and so many others.

There is a longstanding history and problematic practice of racial discrimination based on hair in the United States. There have been countless cases where Black women, men, and children have been discriminated against for wearing natural hair and/or protective styles, including but not limited to braids, locs, twists, etc.! This prevalent form of discrimination includes being fired, passed over for promotions, and having offers of employment rescinded. It impacts our upward mobility, and has been the reason far too many Black children have missed school, and had negative educational experiences.

Faith Finnidy was sent home in tears because she wore beautiful braids that were deemed a violation of school rules. Deandre Arnold was told he couldn't participate in his high school graduation ceremony due to his display of cultural pride and locs. And I think many of us in the world, collectively gasped, as we witnessed Andrew Johnson, a student wrestler, be forced to make a decision he should have never been asked to make, and choose between having his locs cut and identity attacked, or forfeiting a match he had earned the right to participate in.

While some anti-discrimination laws currently protect the choice to wear an afro, we know afros are not the only natural presentation or style of Black hair. HB 1444 (Smith) will ensure protection against discrimination based on hairstyles by extending statutory protection to hair texture and protective styles.

This issue warrants a legislative fix, and I work directly with forward thinking elected officials on multiple levels nationwide to ensure the change occurs. I am proud to have worked closely with my sister, Assemblywoman Tremaine Wright, as she carried the first CROWN Act to victory in the state of New York, and to work directly with my good friends Congressman Cedric Richmond and Senator Cory Booker on the federal bill we agreed to work on now two years ago.

It is my ask, that on this day you will all recognize the importance of everyone having the right to rock his or her natural CROWN, without being on the receiving end of racial discrimination.

On behalf of the CROWN Coalition, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

Sincerely,

Adjoa B. Asamoah
Impact Strategist, CROWN Coalition