



**Testimony in Support of SB531
Discrimination - Definition of Race - Hair Texture and Hairstyles
Tuesday, February 18, 2020**

TO: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair; The Honorable Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair;
and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Laura E. Irwin, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board, the County's federally designated anti-poverty group, strongly supports SB531. This bill would outlaw discrimination based on a person's protective hairstyle and would expand the definition of race to include traits historically associated with race, including hairstyle and texture. As the governing body for the Community Action Agency, which grew out of the Civil Rights Movement, our Board believes that discrimination based on a person's membership in a historically oppressed group should be outlawed at all levels. We strongly believe that a person's protective hairstyle should never prevent him/her from obtaining employment, housing, public accommodations, or any other opportunity. Those who are discriminated based on protective hairstyle should have grounds to seek recourse.

This bill is especially important in the context of employment because hairstyle policies are often used as the basis for employment discrimination. Our Board supports policies that help individuals move towards self-sufficiency and we continue to advocate for removing barriers to jobs that provide adequate income to cover the cost of basic necessities. Such opportunities can be hard to find in expensive areas like Montgomery County where the Self-Sufficiency Standard for a single adult with one infant and one school-age child is \$91,257 – over three times the County's current minimum wage.¹ Obstacles such as discrimination based on hairstyle should never present a barrier to any employment opportunity.

Here in Montgomery County, recent legislation outlawed discrimination based on protective hairstyle. Our board strongly believe that this protection must be expanded to all Marylanders. We ask that you pass SB531 and continue to explore policies that eliminate discrimination and increase equity throughout the state.

¹ <http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/maryland>