

Subject: Testimony in Support of SB656/HB1533 – The Crown and Care Act

To: Shaneka Henson and Members of the Committee

Dear Senator Henson and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

My name is Taijhe Belt, and I am writing to you today as a Licensed Cosmetologist of 12 years to urge the swift enforcement and strengthening of Maryland's ban on toxic hair and beauty chemicals through SB656/HB1533, the Crown and Care Act.

While Maryland took a bold step in 2025 by banning harmful substances such as formaldehyde, parabens, and PFAS, these toxins remain on store shelves because of an enforcement gap. For Black women, this is a matter of life and death. We are 50 percent more likely to use chemical straighteners and face two to three times the rate of uterine fibroids compared to white women.

As we move toward enforcement, we must ensure that the solution does not destabilize the livelihoods of Black stylists or limit access to culturally essential hair care products.

The Scope of the Crisis

The chemicals targeted by this bill are not limited to a few niche products. They are systemic and serve as preservatives and active ingredients in the staples of the Black beauty industry, including:

Essential Styling Products

- Edge controls
- Lace glues
- Heat-resistant serums
- Braiding hair

Color and Texture Treatments

- Relaxers
- Keratin treatments

- Hair colors
- Smoothing balms

Everyday Cosmetics

- Shampoos and conditioners
- Mascara and eyeliner
- Lipsticks

Black consumers already face a disparity of hundreds to thousands fewer product options compared to other demographics. We cannot afford a removal strategy that leaves our shelves empty and our stylists without the tools they need to serve their clients.

Preventing “Weaponized Incompetence” and Unemployment

Without a strategic transition plan, enforcement could result in what I describe as weaponized incompetence. If the state removes every product containing banned ingredients without requiring reformulated alternatives, we risk triggering a statewide unemployment spike in the beauty industry.

Manufacturers may choose to leave the Maryland market rather than update their formulas for a single state. To prevent this outcome, the Crown and Care Act must prioritize reformulation in addition to removal.

The law should require that:

- Toxic ingredients are banned and replaced with safe alternatives.
 - Reformulated, non-harmful versions of these products remain available in Maryland.
 - Manufacturers are incentivized or required to meet updated safety standards instead of abandoning the market.
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Learning from Other States: Transition and Compliance Support

To protect small businesses and stylists during this transition, Maryland can adopt offset and support models already implemented elsewhere.

Financial Reimbursement

- Follow the model of the Washington State Department of Ecology, which has supported safer salon initiatives by providing reimbursements of up to \$5,000 to help small salons replace toxic inventory with safer alternatives.

Clear Compliance Pathways

- Establish a reasonable phase-out timeline similar to Washington's 2026 framework.
- Provide a publicly accessible database of verified, professional-grade clean beauty products.

Manufacturer Accountability

- Utilize the authority of the Maryland Attorney General to hold manufacturers financially responsible for reformulation costs.
- Ensure that the burden does not fall solely on Black stylists, who already face disproportionate health risks and economic vulnerability.

Conclusion

We deserve beauty without a chemical tax on our lives.

We want the companies that profit from Black hair to value Black health enough to change their ingredients, not simply withdraw from our markets.

By enforcing SB656/HB1533 with a focus on restitution, research, and transition support, Maryland can lead the nation in protecting both the health and economic future of Black beauty professionals.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB656/HB1533.

Sincerely,

Taijhe Belt
Cosmetologist- GSB Lounge