



SIGMA GAMMA RHO SORORITY, INC.

Northeastern Region

"A Non-governmental Organization Associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information"

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

HOUSE BILL 1533

Public Health – Cosmetic Products – Enforcement and Penalties for Prohibited Ingredients

(Crown and Care Act – Protecting Communities from Harmful Hair Chemicals)

Maryland House of Delegates – Health Committee

2026 Legislative Session

Submitted By:

Dawne Stanton, Regional Director

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. – Northeastern Region

Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison and Distinguished Members of the Health Committee:

On behalf of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated, Northeastern Region, I am honored to submit this written testimony in strong support of House Bill 1533, the Crown and Care Act. Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. is a historically African American sorority founded on November 12, 1922, at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana, by seven young Black women educators. For more than a century, our organization has been guided by the mission of enhancing the quality of life for women and their families through community service, civil and social action. The Crown and Care Act speaks directly to the heart of that mission, and we are proud to stand firmly behind it.

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. is pleased to note that the lead sponsor of this legislation, Delegate Tiffany T. Alston, is a member of our organization. We are grateful for her leadership on this issue and for her commitment to health equity for women and communities of color.

The harmful chemicals targeted by House Bill 1533, including formaldehyde, PFAS, phthalates, mercury, and parabens, are not abstract regulatory concerns. They are ingredients that disproportionately appear in personal care products marketed to Black women, and the health consequences are grave and well-documented. A 2025 Environmental Working Group analysis of more than 4,000 personal care products marketed to Black women found that nearly 80 percent rated moderate to high hazard, a disparity that has persisted for nearly a decade. Researchers have linked these chemical exposures to elevated rates of breast cancer, uterine cancer, and uterine fibroids in Black women. Black women who regularly use permanent hair dyes face a 60 percent increased risk of breast cancer and a 44 percent higher risk of uterine fibroids. Those who regularly straighten their hair are 30 percent more likely to develop breast cancer and twice as likely to develop uterine cancer.

Formaldehyde, one of the specific ingredients prohibited under this bill, is classified by the National Toxicology Program as a known human carcinogen. It appears in hair-straightening treatments and relaxers, products that have long been central to the grooming routines of many Black women, not always by personal preference, but often in response to societal and professional pressures to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards. A 2023 study found that postmenopausal Black women who used chemical hair relaxers more than twice a year faced a 50 percent increased risk of uterine cancer. These are not statistics. These are our mothers, our daughters, our Sorors.

Maryland took an important first step in 2021 when it enacted its initial prohibition on certain harmful cosmetic ingredients. House Bill 1533 builds upon that foundation by adding critical enforcement mechanisms and ensuring accountability. The bill empowers the Maryland Department of Health to investigate complaints, conduct on-site inspections, and sample products to verify compliance. It also establishes civil liability for violations, allowing harmed individuals to seek damages and recover attorney's fees. These are not punitive measures; they are essential tools to make the law meaningful. Without enforcement authority, prohibitions on paper offer little protection to women who are purchasing these products on store shelves today.

The beauty industry has demonstrated that it will not self-regulate to protect communities of color. Research published as recently as February 2026 by Silent Spring Institute, found that 41 out of 43 hair extension products tested contained hazardous chemicals, including compounds linked to breast cancer and reproductive harm. While federal action has stalled, Maryland has an opportunity and an obligation to act decisively to protect its residents.

The mission of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. is to enhance the quality of life for women and their families through community service, civil and social action. Our national health initiatives, including our Women's Wellness program and Project Cradle Care, have long addressed the health disparities that fall most heavily on women of color. The Crown and Care Act is precisely the kind of systemic intervention our organization has advocated for throughout our 103-year history. When Black women are sold products that contain known carcinogens, products that are more common in communities of color than in the broader marketplace, this is not an accident. It is a failure of regulation, and it demands a legislative remedy.

Our slogan, "Greater Service, Greater Progress," calls us to act wherever injustice persists. The cosmetic industry's disproportionate harm to Black women is an injustice that has been documented, studied, and largely ignored for decades. With more than 500 chapters across the United States and internationally, and over 100,000 collegiate and professional women in our ranks, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. stands ready to support public education and community outreach efforts in connection with this legislation. We will ensure that our members, our youth affiliates the Rhoer Club and Rhosebuds, and the broader communities we serve know their rights under this law.

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., Northeastern Region, urges this Committee to advance House Bill 1533 without delay. The Crown and Care Act represents a meaningful, evidence-based step toward beauty justice and health equity for Black women and all Marylanders. We are grateful for the leadership of Delegate Tiffany Alston, a member of our organization, in bringing this legislation forward, and we are proud to lend our full support.

We ask this Committee to pass House Bill 1533 and send a clear message: the health and lives of Black women in Maryland matter, and Maryland will not allow the marketplace to continue profiting from their harm.

If you have any questions please contact me at syntaktes@sgrhoneregion.org and legislativeactionchair@sgrhoneregion.org.

Respectfully submitted,

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