

Committee on federal and state affairs
Testimony on behalf of HB 2044

Good morning, Representative Carpenter and members of the Committee. My name is Anita Alexander, I live here in Topeka, and I'm here today as a black woman and a Kansan.

I support HB 2044 and I want to urge you to vote yes on this bill.

We have heard stories in the news and in national headlines about black kids and adults having to cut their dreads or take out their braids to play in a sport or even occupy a space. Discrimination against natural and protective hair isn't confined to these few instances that make the news. Natural hairstyles are often viewed as less professional and cause school and workplace discrimination.

I know a lot of times it can be hard to understand something that you're not personally affected by, as I look around the members of this committee I know most of you have not experienced this type of racial discrimination. So I hope you will hear my testimony as someone who has been impacted by this issue.

Our hair affects the way we are treated even when we have earned our way into professional spaces, as I have experienced firsthand. I wore my hair in cornrows to a work meeting, and I was on the fence about doing this because I know how it is, but I did it anyway and in that meeting, I was told I probably didn't understand what I was talking about. I called that meeting. I can assure you I knew what I was talking about. There have been times I've been told braids are not a professional style and times that I've been told that my hair looks so nice when it is straightened. We see that when we straighten our hair to look more Caucasian we get approval and on the other hand we are perceived as less professional when we wear our hair in its natural state. But we are not responsible for other people's cultural bias and folks should know not to discriminate against us because of it.

People of color feel and see the difference between how they are received when they are wearing hairstyles that are historically associated with race. Our hair and hair styles have a social and cultural significance that is important, but in no way does it affect our ability to perform in school or work and it should not be used to segregate us. There is no question that additional protections are needed. Sometimes it costs people jobs, sometimes opportunities, But it regularly makes people question how they can wear their natural hair because of how they will be treated. Not providing protections for such a basic right is a sneaky way to discriminate and exclude people of color. It is your job to stand up for citizens. That's why I urge you to vote yes on his bill.

That concludes my testimony, thank you for your time, and I will stand for questions when appropriate.

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