

January 11, 2024

Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs
State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Health Forward Foundation support for Senate Bill 36 – updating Kansas act against discrimination to include traits associated with ancestry, including hair texture and protective hairstyles.

Chair Thompson and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Health Forward Foundation (Health Forward), I submit this letter of testimony in support of Senate Bill 36. Health Forward works to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems. We support this legislation – also known as the CROWN Act – as it will ensure equity in employment while challenging implicit bias around what is professional, beautiful, and acceptable in view of characteristics tied to Blackness. It is an issue that is invisible to most people but has a deep and lifelong impact for Black people.

Preventing discrimination based on hairstyle has economic impacts in Kansas and beyond. A 2019 Dove study showed that Black women are 1.5 times more likely to be sent home from work because of their hair. Black women with textured or curly hair are 2.5 times more likely to experience microaggressions in the workplace. In addition, 80% of Black women admitted they feel social pressure to change their hair from its natural state to assimilate into dominant culture within the workplace.

This is a significant workforce issue as discrimination based on hair texture (‘texturism’) locks people out of quality jobs. With Black women’s hair almost 2.5 times more likely to be viewed as ‘unprofessional’, qualified individuals are being overlooked in the hiring process. A 2020 Duke University study found that job candidates with curlier hair were less likely to be recommended for a position. With a workforce shortage in health sciences professionals in Kansas, we cannot afford to keep qualified individuals from being employed in high-demand, high-paying careers particularly for reasons as trivial as the style of their hair.

Health Forward asks legislators on this committee to vote yes on SB 36. This legislation is important to affirm Black individuals’ ability to wear their hair naturally in the workplace and not be subject to the discrimination of ‘race-neutral’ policies that ban certain hairstyles. Please feel free to reach out to me at nmadden@healthforward.org if you have any questions or requests for additional information.

Respectfully,

Nathan J. Madden, Ph.D.
Impact Strategist - Policy
Health Forward Foundation

**OUR
PURPOSE**

Every day we work to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems.