



February 22, 2021

To: The House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil Law  
From: Michele Ruffin, Oregon Political Director, Forward Together Action  
Re: Support of HB 2935, Oregon CROWN Act

Dear Chair Power, Vice Chair Wallan and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michele Ruffin and I am the political director of Forward Together Action, a multi-issue organization working with Black, Indigenous, Women of Color and Non-Binary people to push for the systems change we need for all families to thrive. I'm testifying today on behalf of our organization's full support of a bill that would prohibit discrimination based on race-specific hairstyles, HB 2935, known as the Oregon CROWN Act.

At FTA, we've not only heard the stories of local Black women and youth who have been discriminated against at work or at school, we also can see this reality when we look at workplace data from across the country. The CROWN research study conducted in 2019 found that Black women are 1.5 times more likely to be sent home from the workplace because of their hair and 3.4 times more likely to be perceived as unprofessional.<sup>1</sup> This is unacceptable and has real, measurable social and economic impact when because of your hairstyle you are forced to leave work or cannot participate in a school activity as a student. I'll refer you to the submitted written testimony by members of Forward Together Action so you can read/ hear their stories directly, but would like to highlight the opportunity this committee has to make our racial discrimination laws sharper and more focused through this bill.

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<sup>1</sup> Dove CROWN Research Study, 2019,  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5edc69fd622c36173f56651f/t/5edea2fe5ddef345e087361/1591650865168/Dove\\_research\\_brochure2020\\_FINAL3.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5edc69fd622c36173f56651f/t/5edea2fe5ddef345e087361/1591650865168/Dove_research_brochure2020_FINAL3.pdf)



By ensuring that hair texture and race-based hairstyles like locs, twists, braids and knots are protected, we affirm in our discrimination laws that Black Oregonians should not be forced to divest from racial and cultural identity to adapt to workplaces or schools, places that can be predominantly white, but also places that have rules and policies which come from a long history's past of racial exclusion.

I'd also like to share our support of the piece in this bill that ensures any organization that administers interscholastic activities have a racial discrimination policy in place. I think it's important to note that although it seems like a no-brainer or that many schools would have this in place already, it's only beneficial to ensure that that policy be specific and include race, color and national origin. Race-specific hairstyles should not prevent a student from participating in interscholastic or sports activities--- so we appreciate and support this provision in the bill.

Lastly, I'll share that similar legislation has passed in 7 states including California, Washington, Colorado, and New York. More than 20 states have introduced legislation like this to ensure this discrimination does not continue. Let's make Oregon the next one.

I urge you to vote yes on HB 2935 and thank you for your consideration and time today.

Sincerely,

Michele Ruffin

Oregon Political Director

Forward Together Action