

New Connecticut CROWN Act Bans Natural Hair Discrimination in the Workplace

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Connecticut has joined the growing list of states that prohibit discrimination on the basis of traits historically associated with race, including hair. On March 10, 2021, Connecticut adopted legislation to ban natural hair discrimination in the workplace.

In 2019, California was the first state to implement a law called the CROWN Act, an acronym for Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair. Other states that have joined California include Colorado, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, and Washington.

Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont signed into law House Bill No. 6515, An Act Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair, which amends Connecticut's anti-discrimination law to define race as "inclusive of ethnic traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles." The new law further defines "protective hairstyles" as including, but not limited to, "wigs, headwraps and hairstyles such as individual braids, cornrows, locs, twists, Bantu knots, afros and afro puffs."

Employers across the United States have long-implemented dress code and grooming policies. Those policies that restrict certain hairstyles have come under scrutiny amidst growing awareness that certain hair texture and hairstyles are closely related to an individual's race. While the Connecticut CROWN Act does not eliminate an employer's ability to enforce dress code and grooming policies, employers should review such policies, as well as their hiring and employment practices, to ensure they do not prohibit protected hairstyles or traits historically associated with race. Employers also are encouraged to train managers and supervisors on this new law.

Furthermore, the phrase "ethnic traits historically associated with race" may be subject to interpretation or clarification over time.

Please contact a Jackson Lewis attorney with any questions about the CROWN Act, dress code and grooming policies, workplace training for management and employees, and other preventive practices.

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