MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE REGULAR SESSION 2025

By: Representative Paden

To: Judiciary A; Business and Commerce

HOUSE BILL NO. 322

AN ACT TO CREATE THE "CREATE A RESPECTFUL AND OPEN WORKPLACE FOR NATURAL (CROWN) HAIR ACT"; TO PROHIBIT CREATION OF WORKPLACE AND SCHOOL POLICIES THAT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF NATURAL HAIRSTYLES; TO PROHIBIT DISCRIMINATION BY AN EMPLOYER, SCHOOL, SCHOOL DISTRICT OR ADMINISTRATOR ENGAGED IN COMMERCE ON THE BASIS OF HAIR TEXTURE; TO PROHIBIT TERMINATION, REDUCTION OF WORK HOURS, OR PAYING A REDUCED SALARY OR WAGE OR EXPULSION OR DISMISSAL BASED ON HAIR TEXTURE; TO PROVIDE THE REMEDIES FOR ANY PERSON WHO IS AGGRIEVED BY VIOLATION OF THIS ACT; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Create A Respectful And Open Workplace For Natural (CROWN) Hair Act."

SECTION 2. The Mississippi Legislature finds:

(a) That discrimination based on "natural hairstyles" exists in industries engaged in commerce or in the production of goods for commerce, schools throughout the United States and society as a whole;

(b) Such differentials depresses the wages, living standards, quality of education and quality of life for employees and students of color, and such depression has a negative impact

on their health and efficiency and drop-out rate, thereby increasing the poverty rate in Mississippi;

(c) That workplace, school and any polices and dress codes that restrict natural hairstyles, including, but not limited to, afros, braids, twists and locs have a disparate impact on African Americans, Latinas and other ethnic groups;

(d) That hair texture has historically been one (1) of the many determining factors of race; and

(e) That acting in accordance with the constitutional values of fairness, equity and opportunity for all requires the Legislature to ban any policies that discriminate or treat any person unfairly in any manner.

SECTION 3. (1) No employer, school, school district or administrator may create a dress code or policy that prohibits natural hair from being worn in the workplace during workplace hours, school hours or during workplace or school events. For purposes of this act, the term "natural hair" means afros, braids, twists, locs and any similar hairstyle.

(2) No employer, school, school district or administrator shall discriminate in any manner against any person by paying a salary or wage, refusing to provide a salary or wage increase, deny a promotion or other employment opportunity, or expel or in any manner discipline a student or employee on the basis of any natural hairstyle worn by the person. For employers, when comparing an employee who does not wear natural hair if such

employees are performing equal work on jobs that require equal skill, effort and responsibility to perform, and which are performed under similar working conditions, except where such decision is made pursuant to:

(a) A seniority system; however, time spent on leave due to a pregnancy-related condition and parental, family and medical leave, shall not reduce the seniority-level of an employee;

(b) A merit system;

(c) A system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production; or

(d) A differential based on any bona fide factor other than hairstyles, if the factor:

(i) Is job-related with respect to the position and necessary for the business; and

(ii) Accounts for the entire differential.

An employer who is paying a wage rate differential in violation of this subsection shall not, in order to comply with the provisions of this subsection, reduce the wage rate of any other employee.

(3) For purposes of administration and enforcement of this act, any amounts owed to an employee that have been withheld in violation of this act shall be deemed to be unpaid minimum wages or unpaid compensation.

(4) It shall be an unlawful practice for an employer, school, school district or administrator to retaliate or in any other manner discriminate against any person because that person has opposed a practice made unlawful by this act or because that person has made a charge, filed a complaint, or instituted or caused to be instituted any investigation, proceeding, hearing, or action under or related to this act, including an investigation conducted by the employer, or has testified or is planning to testify, or has assisted, or participated in any manner in any such investigation, proceeding, or hearing under this act.

(5) (a) A civil action asserting a violation of this act may be maintained against any employer, school, school district or administrator in any court of competent jurisdiction by any one (1) or more employees for or on behalf of the employee, a group of employees, and other employees similarly situated. Any such action shall commence no later than two (2) years after the discriminatory practice declared unlawful by this act has occurred. A discriminatory practice occurs when a discriminatory compensation decision or other practice is adopted, when an employee is subjected to a discriminatory compensation decision or other practice, or when an employee is affected by the application of a discriminatory compensation decision or other practice, including each time wages, benefits, or other compensation is paid based on the discriminatory compensation decision or other practice.

(b) If an employer, school, school district or administrator is found in violation of this act, the aggrieved person may recover in a civil action the amount of their unpaid wages; liquidated damages; compensatory damages; punitive damages as may be appropriate, where such person demonstrates that the employer, school, school district or administrator acted with malice or reckless indifference; other equitable relief as may be appropriate; and the costs of the action and reasonable attorney's fees.

SECTION 4. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.