On July 26, 2022, Massachusetts joined seventeen other states which prohibit race discrimination based on natural hairstyles when Governor Charlie Baker signed the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (“Crown”) Act, which bans discrimination based on hairstyles at work, school and in public accommodations. The Crown Act was passed unanimously by the Massachusetts legislature. It takes effect on October 24, 2022.

The Crown Act amends the Massachusetts Fair Employment Practices Act, Chapter 151B, as well as the Massachusetts public accommodations law, Chapter 272, Section 98. The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination will enforce the law in connection with workplace discrimination.

The Crown Act results from a number of high profile cases in which employees and
others were subjected to discrimination due to natural hairstyles such as Afros, braids, Bantu knots, and extensions. According to the *Washington Post*, two Boston area twins, Mya and Deanna Cook, made national headlines when their school punished them for wearing braided hair extensions. The NAACP and the Massachusetts ACLU filed a complaint on their behalf with the state’s Education Department, claiming the school’s policy was racially discriminatory. The twins, now college seniors, stood beside Governor Baker as he signed the bill into law.

A similar bill was passed by the United States House of Representatives earlier this year but has yet to be addressed by the Senate.

Massachusetts employers and those in states with laws similar to the Crown Act are advised to revise their anti-discrimination and grooming policies to include natural hair as a protected category of race discrimination. Employers should also train their hiring managers and supervisors as well as those involved with hiring decisions.

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