

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 22, 2021

The Honorable Nany Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Schumer:

As co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls, we urge you to ensure that floor consideration of the CROWN Act is a priority in the calendar of the 117th Congress.

As you know, Black women face a disruptive stigma, bias, and discrimination that impedes their progress financially, educationally, and socially. We founded the caucus to address those hurdles and press for equity in the policy making that Members of Congress are responsible for. The CROWN Act is among many bills poised to tear down a major barrier for this constituency – hair discrimination.

The idea that you could be penalized for a braid or twist, or even wearing the natural curl that grows from your head, seems outlandish, yet we know that women and girls of color are subject to just such situations all too regularly. In 2018, An 11-year-old black girl was sent home from school for having braids with extensions. In 2017, teen sisters with braids were told they would receive dress code “infractions” unless they removed the hair extensions from their braids – despite having shown administrators yearbook photos of white peers with extensions and hair alterations. These barely coded attacks on Black hair erode the confidence and value of our young people in a moment where it is already buffeted with the normal challenges of adolescence. Worse, they often result in the disruption of students’ educational continuity, pulling them out of the classroom, appending undeserved labels to their character – and occasionally introducing them to the school to prison pipeline.

These penalties extend to the workforce, where the so-called professionalism of a hairstyle may result in lower salary, diminished opportunity for career advancement, a decision not to hire a candidate, or a decision to fire someone perfectly competent. With all the other challenges Black women will face to their very existence, our hair cannot continue to be among the things that holds us back.

We know that there is much to do to ensure equity for all Americans in a time as challenging as this. But there are few steps so simple, nor so impactful, to help ensure a fair playing field for Black women than this one. As the bill has now been re-introduced, we urge you to ensure it receives a vote on the House floor as soon as possible.

As always, thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Co-chair
Congressional Caucus on Black
Women and Girls



Robin Kelly
Co-chair
Congressional Caucus on Black
Women and Girls



Yvette D. Clarke
Co-chair
Congressional Caucus on Black
Women and Girls