

HRW CLIENT ALERT

July 29
2022

Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (“CROWN”) Act

On July 26, 2022, Governor Charlie Baker signed into law the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (“CROWN”) Act, which prohibits discrimination based on natural and protective hairstyles in workplaces, school districts, and certain school-related organizations. The Massachusetts CROWN Act makes it illegal to discriminate against a person for donning natural hair texture, hair type, and hairstyles, which include, but are not limited to, braids, locks, twists, Bantu knots, and other formations. It also blocks Massachusetts employees, students, and other individuals from being denied employment or educational opportunities due to their hairstyles and hair textures.

By enacting the CROWN Act, Massachusetts follows 17 other states that have passed similar legislation banning discrimination on the basis of a person’s natural or protective hairstyle. Although a federal CROWN Act was introduced to Congress and passed by the House of Representatives in March of 2022, it has not yet passed the Senate to date.

Under the new law, employers and school districts in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts may not adopt or implement a policy or code that impairs or prohibits natural hairstyles. In response to the passage of the CROWN Act, Massachusetts employers should refrain from banning certain natural hairstyles outright. Employers should consider updating their equal employment opportunity and nondiscrimination policies and review their employee handbook and any grooming or appearance policies to ensure that they are not in violation of the anti-discrimination provisions of the law. Employers may also consider providing training opportunities to managers, supervisors, and hiring personnel so they are informed of these new protections.

The CROWN Act will take effect on October 24, 2022, and the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination will be responsible for enforcing these protections. The Massachusetts law may entitle an employee who proves their employer discriminated against them on the basis of their natural hairstyle to recover economic and compensatory damages, punitive damages, and reasonable attorneys’ fees.

For questions, please consult your HRW attorney, including:

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- Catherine Reuben (creuben@hrwlawyers.com / 617-348-4316);
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- Any member of the [HRW Team](#) to discuss your particular situation.