



January 8, 2024

To: Chairman and Senator Thompson

As President and on behalf of The Topeka (KS) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated, we submit this written testimony and stand in support of Senate Bill 36, seeking to eliminate discrimination of hair styles and hair textures in workplaces and educational institutions and in all environments offering opportunities for Kansans.

Our beloved organization, The Links, Incorporated is an international, not-for profit corporation established in 1945 and is one of the nation's oldest and largest volunteer service organizations committed to enriching, sustaining, and ensuring the culture and economic survival of African Americans and other people of African ancestry (linksinc.org). Our web page will reflect the rich culture and diverse hairstyles that we believe illustrate who we are.

Our members include varied generations of African Americans who take pride in embracing and sharing their heritage by connecting with each other; providing over 1 million documented hours of community service annually in transforming communities through service; and in embracing and respecting the legacy of our culture which includes embracing natural hairstyles and its associated health benefits.

Why is it important to pass Senate Bill 36? The passing of Senate Bill 36 would highlight for Kansans that our legislators are serious about equity and truly believe that Kansas was built on this foundation as a Free State.

Angela Onwauachi-Willig wrote in her article *POV: Why the CROWN Act is Needed*, "Imagine, for one minute, that we live in an alternate universe where employer and school grooming policies that ban "unprofessional" or "faddish" hairstyles are routinely employed as a reason for firing or refusing to hire, individuals with naturally straight hair. The normative standard for hair in this alternate universe is tightly coiled, curly hair..... In this alternate universe, many employees and students with naturally straight hair find themselves at a crossroads...nearly all of whom identify as white-could wear their hair in locs twists, or an Afro, but to do so, they would need to change the texture and structure of their hair by utilizing dangerous chemical processes that could cause burns on their scalp and/or result in major hair breakage or loss.... Equally troubling are the messages being sent that their natural hair texture is inferior and undesirable and that they must change a part of their body to simply be employed. "

In this alternative universe described above, White people would then begin to file legal actions claiming discrimination to courts consisting primarily of Black judges, where they find their concerns dismissed and/or minimized. In actuality, we live in this world. However, currently, the roles are reversed (Onwauachi-Willig, 2022).

We can do better. This is the year, 2024, for Kansas to break the ties that allow such divisive strategies in our schools and workplace environments. Let Senate Bill 36 pass via bipartisan effort so constituents may feel proud of the diligent work of our legislators. This bill has been put forth for nearly 5 years and we have seen our neighboring states pass the Crown Act as well as the City of Lawrence, Kansas.

We look forward to each committee member being in agreement to pass this bill and become an effective agent for ensuring that Kansans embraces all Kansans.

Please support SB 36! Thank you for your time.

Monice Crawford

President

The Topeka (KS) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated