



Shirley's

KITCHEN CABINET

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2044

February 15, 2023

Chairman Carpenter and members of the House Federal and State Affairs Committee:

Shirley's Kitchen Cabinet (Shirley's KC) is a non-profit non-partisan organization dedicated to amplifying the voices and power of Black women through education and advocacy, so they can be effective advocates for the issues that matter to them and the communities they serve.

Our work to create positive change around issues such as economic prosperity, health and vitality, education, and the eradication of violence is derailed by rules in grooming policies in schools that prohibit natural hairstyles such as locs, twist, and braids. These rules disproportionately affect Black Kansans among others and create unnecessary barriers to growing our economy, providing access to employment and education. Our over 2000 members are in support of this bill that will expand opportunities for all kansans while strengthening anti-discrimination laws that currently exist.

- In 2018, a teen applying for employment in Kansas City was denied the role because of his natural hairstyle. A college cheerleader in Ottawa Kansas was kicked off the cheer squad for wearing braids. School policies that directly or indirectly target natural hairstyles more likely to be worn by Black Americans allow for discrimination that is currently legal under state law.
- At the root of Kansas HB 2044 is a solution designed to address workforce development challenges.
- "The Challenge to Compete Kansas Workforce 2020" (updated 2021) - a report from the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, stemming from the chamber's Kansas Vision 2025 strategic action plan to identify how Kansas can better compete in attracting, building, and creating wealth in Kansas. The findings in this report show us that Kansas's available workforce will not grow during the next decade and businesses have significant trouble finding workers with the skills they need. According to the report, the talent attraction messaging should stress that Kansas as a place that values a talented workforce and welcomes and encourages diversity.
- Right now, the strength of our neighboring competitors poses a challenge to growing our workforce according to the report. In the 2019 regional workforce development rankings, Kansas ranks sixth (6th) out of seven (7) neighboring states (West North Central states) and last in the updated 2020 rankings. **Our top neighboring competitors have introduced the bill, passed the bill and signed it into law. Minnesota's governor signed the bill into law this month. We have to put our state in the best position to compete in attracting, building, and creating wealth in Kansas.**
 - o Minnesota Iowa, and Nebraska, ranked as the best each year.
 - o Minnesota's governor signed the bill into law yesterday (Feb.1, 2023)
 - o Nebraska has already passed this bill.
 - o Iowa's 2023 bill has already passed in the Iowa House Chamber.
- This bill will go a long way in sending the message to talent in our neighboring competitive states that Kansas values a talented workforce and welcomes and encourages diversity.



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- The US Army, Navy and Marine Corps have lifted bans on natural hairstyles that are commonly worn by African-American women. Braids, locs and twist are now included in its list of acceptable hairstyles, *but* these styles are not exempt from meeting current uniformity standards.
- Similar laws have been passed in Nebraska, Illinois, Colorado, Tennessee, Alaska, New Mexico, Minnesota, Nevada and Virginia - 20 states and over 40 cities have enacted this bill.

True equality will be achieved by maximizing the ability of Kansans to become self-sufficient. Access to jobs, education is key to self-sufficiency.

We urge Kansas lawmakers to support this bill to help grow opportunities in our economy, employment and education.. No one should face discrimination in the workplace or in schools for wearing their hair the way it grows naturally. All Kansans should be allowed to celebrate their natural God given traits without fear of judgment or consequence. Thank you for your time and attention. We welcome any questions you might have and are happy to serve as your resource on this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Michele L. Watley
Founder - Shirley's Kitchen Cabinet