

Massachusetts Bans Hairstyle Discrimination

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Key Takeaways:

- The Massachusetts CROWN Act, signed into law this week, bans discrimination on the basis of natural and protective hairstyles historically associated with race.
- Employers should review their policies relating to employee appearance and grooming to ensure compliance with the law.
- Employers should consider updating their anti-discrimination policies and training programs to take the new law into account.

On July 26, 2022, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker signed into law the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (“CROWN”) Act. Among other things, the law prohibits discrimination based on “traits historically associated with race” such as hair texture, hair length, and protective hairstyles such as braids, locks, twists, Bantu knots, hair coverings and other formations. Such discrimination will now be treated as any other form of prohibited racial discrimination under Massachusetts law.

The law will take effect 90 days after Gov. Baker’s signature, on October 24, 2022. Prior to that time, employers should review their employee handbooks and other workplace policies, particularly any policies imposing appearance or grooming standards for employees, to ensure that such policies comply with the CROWN Act. Additionally, employers should consider updating their anti-discrimination policies and training programs to address the new prohibitions imposed by the new law.

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