



February 10, 2021

The Honorable Jo-Ann Ryan
Chair, Committee on Ordinances
Providence City Hall
25 Dorrance Street, Providence, Rhode Island, 02903

Re: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 16 "Offenses and Miscellaneous Provisions", Article 11 "Discrimination", Section 16-54 "Definitions" of the Providence Code of Ordinances.

Dear Chairperson Jo-Ann Ryan and Members of the Committee on Ordinances,

The Providence Human Relations Commission writes to you today in full support of ending hair discrimination.

Impaneled in 1963, the Providence Human Relations Commission works to protect and expand residents' rights to fair housing, education, employment, credit and public accommodations, free from discrimination. We believe that legally banning discrimination based on hair style, type, and texture is an important next step to ending discrimination on the basis of race.

The shameful history of hair discrimination is long and deeply rooted in slavery and oppression of the Black community, dating back to the 1700s in Louisiana, when laws were enacted to ban or cover up natural hair styles of specific targeted communities. Centuries later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex and national origin, but the courts were left to decide what constitutes racial discrimination. Today, it is no secret that racial discrimination persists in the form of hair discrimination. We've seen it in schools, where students are asked to cut or change their hair for fear of their hair being a "distraction." We've seen it in the workplaces, where hair type, hair styles, and hair textures are deemed "unprofessional." The deep racial undertones of this form of discrimination is clear and passing an ordinance to make it illegal is an important next step for civil rights in Providence.

To correct and clarify the law in this regard is no small matter. Passage of this ordinance will send a clear message to Providence communities that Black bodies belong and that Black lives matter. We urge the codification of these protections through the passage of An Ordinance Amending Chapter 16 "Offenses and Miscellaneous Provisions", Article 11 "Discrimination", Section 16-54 "Definitions" of the Providence Code of Ordinances. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia E. LaSalle
Chair
Providence Human Relations Commission

Andi Wheeler
Executive Director
Providence Human Relations Commission