



Texas' Crown Act Opens Doors for a Better Texas

IDRA Testimony for House Bill 567, submitted by Alisha Tuff to the Texas Senate State Affairs Committee, May 8, 2023

Dear Chair Bryan Hughes and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Alisha Tuff. I am an education policy fellow at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

IDRA supports House Bill 567, the Texas CROWN Act.

HB 567 prohibits schools, colleges and other education entities from discriminating against people with hairstyles that are associated with race, including locs, braids and twists. Specifically, the bill prohibits schools from having provisions in their dress codes that target hair textures and styles that are attributed to students from diverse backgrounds.

This bill is necessary because students in Texas have been punished, suspended, and even prevented from participating in graduation ceremonies and extracurricular activities simply for having hairstyles that reflect their community, culture or religion (Latham Sikes, 2020). Dress codes that allow for these punishments unfairly target Black students, especially Black girls, and other students of color, and contribute to the harmful system of discriminatory school exclusion known as the school-to-prison pipeline.

For example, in 2021, Dove conducted a study and found that many of the young girls who experienced hair discrimination had their first experience as young as age 10 (CROWN Coalition, 2023).

Additionally, dress codes that target students based on their hairstyles and textures can create negative school environments where not all students feel welcome. We know that students are more likely to thrive academically and socially when they feel included by their teachers and peers and can proudly bring all aspects of their identity to the school community (Williams Crenshaw, 2015).

Schools that welcome these expressions – and encourage them as part of the campus culture – create inclusive environments that are beneficial for all students. Discriminatory dress codes and other policies that punish expressions of identity, including hairstyles, lead to unwelcoming, unsafe schools where bias and exclusion are modeled by school leaders (Latham Sikes, 2020).

Our hair should not be used to determine opportunities available or denied to us. In Black culture, our hair has been used to tell stories of our ancestors, to guide us to new areas, and for spiritual

journeys (Horne, 2019). When you strip us of our hair, you send a message that we are unworthy and unwelcome.

If you judged me only by my hair and did not give me a fair shot, then you would miss out on learning about me and all that I have to offer. Would you know I have two degrees and just completed my third master's on Saturday? Or that I will soon start my Ph.D. program in August. Would you know I love reading and watching documentaries or that I love community service? Would you know I am passionate about uplifting children or that I come from humble beginnings?

We urge you to support HB 567. This bill will help to promote more welcoming learning environments and give students the opportunity to authentically embrace their cultures and who they are.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact alisha.tuff@idra.org

Resources

Caldera, A. (2018). Suspendable and Expendable, Kicking Out and Throwing Away Black Girls: An Analysis of a School District's Policies and Practices. *Texas Education Review*, 7(1), 30-47.

<https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/72855>

CROWN Coalition. (2023). Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair, website.

<https://www.thecrownact.com/>

Horne, M. (February 1, 2019). A Visual History of Iconic Black Hairstyles. *History*.

<https://www.history.com/news/black-hairstyles-visual-history-in-photos>

IDRA. (2021). Ending Harmful Discipline to Create Safer Schools, website.

https://www.idra.org/education_policy/ending-harmful-discipline-to-create-safer-schools/

Latham Sikes, C. (February 2020). Racial and Gender Disparities in Dress Code Discipline Point to Need for New Approaches in Schools. *IDRA Newsletter*. <https://idra.news/Feb20c>

Williams Crenshaw, K. (2015). Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected. *African American Policy Forum*, and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies.

https://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/BlackGirlsMatter_Report.pdf

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by leading policy analyses and advocacy; dynamic teacher training and principal coaching; useful research, evaluation and frameworks for action; and innovative student, family and community engagement.