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H.B. 2044 Neutral Testimony
Staffing: Ruth Glover, Executive Director, Kansas Human Rights Commission
February 16, 2023

RE: AN ACT concerning the Kansas act against discrimination; relating to race; including hair texture and protective hairstyles historically associated with race; amending K.S.A. 44-1002 and 44-1015 and repealing the existing sections.

The Kansas Human Rights Commission (KHRC) is responsible for administering and enforcing the Kansas Act Against Discrimination (KAAD). The KHRC primarily accomplishes its mission through the receipt, investigation, and resolution of complaints alleging discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations under the KAAD. The Commission also conducts a public education program as a proactive measure to prevent discrimination by explaining the requirements of Kansas law.

The KHRC's public accommodations jurisdiction does not extend to student enrollment and student activities, pursuant to a Kansas Supreme Court ruling in *Kansas Comm'n on Civil Rights v. USD No. 501, 755 P. 2d 539 - Kan: Supreme Court 1988*. Therefore, the KHRC does not have jurisdiction over student admissions to a school and related student matters dealing with a school, such as student interactions with other students, teachers, school staff, or school administration. As such, the KHRC is not be able to assist students who have been discriminated against by a school, etc. due to their natural hair. The State's anti-bullying statute at K.S.A. 72-6147 might be an appropriate place to prohibit discrimination by other students, schools, school staff, school administration, school boards, etc. based on a student's natural hair, if the Legislature or proponents would like to pursue that option. We currently refer parents who feel their child has been discriminated against in a school setting to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, and/or to their school or school district.

As an unbiased, fact-finding, investigative body, the KHRC takes a neutral stance on the proposed legislation and to avoid the presumption the agency may favor one side or other if the legislation is adopted. It is vital that "Probable Cause" or "No Probable Cause" determinations made on complaints filed with this agency be accepted with credibility.

Current law provides that individuals may file complaints of discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, disability, national origin, ancestry, genetic screening and testing (employment only), familial status (housing only), and retaliation with the KHRC.

Individuals currently can include complaint allegations that they have been subjected to discriminatory actions based on hair texture or a hairstyle historically associated with their race or another applicable protected class, i.e., ancestry, national origin, sex, religion, disability, etc.

The KHRC has a work-sharing agreement with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) for the processing and resolving of employment complaints jointly filed under Kansas statutes and federal

regulations, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The EEOC states discrimination based on characteristics associated with race, such as hair texture or style, violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, even though not all members of the race share the same characteristic. Per the EEOC, race discrimination includes discrimination on the basis of ancestry or physical or cultural characteristics associated with a certain race, such as skin color, hair texture or styles, or certain facial features. The EEOC's *Compliance Manual* on Race and Color Discrimination states,

“Appearance standards generally must be neutral, adopted for nondiscriminatory reasons, consistently applied to persons of all racial and ethnic groups, and, if the standard has a disparate impact, it must be job-related and consistent with business necessity.....Employers can impose neutral hairstyle rules – e.g., that hair be neat, clean, and well-groomed – as long as the rules respect racial differences in hair textures and are applied evenhandedly. For example, Title VII prohibits employers from preventing African American women from wearing their hair in a natural, unpermed “afro” style that complies with the neutral hairstyle rule. Title VII also prohibits employers from applying neutral hairstyle rules more restrictively to hairstyles worn by African Americans.”

EEOC guidance is considered persuasive for the Kansas Human Rights Commission decisions regarding the determination of whether discriminatory employment actions have occurred. The KHRC’s *Online Harassment Prevention Training* program references that “Race discrimination involves treating someone (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because he/she is of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features).”

A change in the law may increase awareness and prompt individuals who did not realize they could file a complaint to do so. However, the KHRC anticipates any increase in complaints and associated workload can be absorbed within existing resources.

H.B. 2044’s proposals mirror, in part, those put forth by the CROWN Act, which proposes a prohibition on race-based hair discrimination because of hair texture or protective hairstyles including braids, locs, twists or bantu knots in employment and educational settings. The acronym CROWN stands for “Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair”. As of February 14, 2023, the website www.thecrownact.com reports 20 states have adopted The CROWN Act, including Colorado and Nebraska. The same website reports 24 states, including Missouri and Nebraska, have the legislation filed or pre-filed. 45 municipalities, counties or U.S. territories have adopted the CROWN Act’s proposals, per the website. The website further reports the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 2116, *Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair*, on March 18, 2022, with a vote of 235-189, but the proposed legislation has not passed in the U.S. Senate.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. We are available for any questions.