

January 9, 2024

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 36

Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs

Chair: Senator Mike Thompson

Vice Chair: Senator Rick Kloos

Ranking Minority Member: Senator Oletha Faust Goudeau

Other Members of the Committee

Dear Mr. Chairman, Senator Thompson,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 36.

I am testifying in support of SB 36, Amending the definition of ancestry in the Kansas act against discrimination to include traits historically associated with ancestry, including hair texture and protective hairstyles.

I support SB 36, as it seeks to further define the word ancestry as an unlawful discriminatory practice. I believe that further expounding upon the meaning of ancestry will provide further understanding of what is not acceptable in practice under the law.

Additionally, by expounding upon the definition of ancestry this bill will give further meaning to the defined unlawful practice of discrimination for reasons of race and religion.

A person's hairstyle could have cultural and religious meaning, it could be a mechanism of protection for healthy hair, or it could be a choice of wearing one's hair in its natural state. As a multi-race people, we are born with different traits and characteristics that are sometimes unique to an individual or to a certain ethnic group. These differences should not be punishable by discrimination.

I am an African American woman who chooses to wear my hair in its natural state. I currently have it styled in a protective hairstyle. Having this protective style allows it to rest from continued manipulation and allows it to grow. Having this hairstyle also provides a quick hairstyle in the morning when preparing for work. If my employer were to request, I change my hairstyle because it doesn't fit into their standard practices it would be disheartening and have an impact on workplace moral. It would also put my hair at risk of damage having to continually have manipulation done to my hair to seek beauty standards.

Nationwide reports on hair discrimination against citizens have been prevalent. We've seen reports on children being requested to or having to cut their natural hair to participate in sports activities and graduation ceremonies. These examples of discrimination leads one to believe that those seeking to abuse and assert their positions of authority are empowered when the law is not clearly defined.

In conclusion, I ask for your strong support of Senate Bill 36. I ask that you amend the definition of ancestry in the Kansas Act Against Discrimination to bring further understanding of the unlawful discriminatory practices under this law.

Sincerely,

Tadonne Neal