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Connecticut Follows Growing Trend in Proscribing Workplace Hair Discrimination

Connecticut has joined a growing list of states, including California, New York and New Jersey, in prohibiting discrimination against employees on the basis of ethnic hairstyles historically associated with race. On March 4, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont signed the CROWN Act, an acronym for "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair," which is aimed at stopping discrimination in the workplace based on natural hairstyles. On March 10, the Connecticut House and Senate adopted the CROWN Act with overwhelming bipartisan support.

The CROWN Act amends the Connecticut Fair Employment Practices Act (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46a-51, *et. seq.*) to include in the definition of race "ethnic traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles." The CROWN Act also elaborates on the definition of "protective hairstyles," such that it includes, but is not limited to, "wigs, headwraps and hairstyles such as individual braids, cornrows, locs, twists, Bantu knots, afros and afro puffs."

Although the CROWN Act specifically references hair texture and protective hairstyles, the statute's protection of "ethnic traits historically associated with race" may be interpreted broadly to include "ethnic traits" other than hairstyles.

With the adoption of the CROWN Act, employers should review their dress-code and grooming policies, as well as their hiring and employment practices, to ensure they do not discriminate against employees on the basis of hair textures and protective hairstyles or other ethnic traits historically associated with race.

Authors



Daniel L. Schwartz
Partner

Stamford, CT | (203) 977-7536

New York, NY | (212) 297-5800

dlschwartz@daypitney.com



Francine Esposito
Partner

Parsippany, NJ | (973) 966-8275

fesposito@daypitney.com



Glenn W. Dowd
Partner

Hartford, CT | (860) 275-0570

gwdowd@daypitney.com



Heather Weine Brochin
Partner

Parsippany, NJ | (973) 966-8199

New York, NY | (212)-297-5800

hbrochin@daypitney.com



Rachel A. Gonzalez
Partner

Parsippany, NJ | (973) 966-8201

New York, NY | (212) 297-5800

rgonzalez@daypitney.com



Theresa A. Kelly
Partner

Parsippany, NJ | (973) 966-8168

tkelly@daypitney.com