Education Committee
Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
H.B. 5436 An Act Prohibiting School District Policies That Discriminate Against Students Based on Natural Hair and Hairstyles
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The Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. For forty-six years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate for policies that advance women’s economic security and combat discrimination.

We urge the committee to support H.B. 5436: An Act Prohibiting School District Policies That Discriminate Against Students Based on Natural Hair and Hairstyles which will prohibit local and regional boards of education from adopting policies that discriminate against students based on natural hair and hairstyles.

House Bill No. 5436 is critical to children and young adults of color who are disproportionately judged and face racial discrimination on the basis of their natural hair, and who are kicked out of classes and school for their natural ethnic hair and hair styles.

Discrimination based on hairstyle and hair texture dates back to slavery when straight “white” hair was considered desirable while natural curly/afro hair was demeaned and considered unacceptable. The term “nappy” was used by the masters’ to describe hair that was undesirable to their culture.1

Hair discrimination has long lasting impacts on a person’s health and wellbeing. Perming natural hair often results in hair breakage to hair loss or even infections.2 Other hairstyles present to others as more ethnic and too “Afro-centric” like dreads, locs, braids etc, which due to racism and bias, may lead to discrimination in the workforce.3

Girls who choose to embrace their natural hair also face unfair treatment and pushback for not wearing their hair straight, especially in school where it is deemed “unprofessional” and often turned into a fireable (or expellable) offense in school settings.

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In August of 2018, Faith Fennidy, a Louisiana sixth grader, was kicked off school grounds because her braided hair violated school policy. The Boston Globe also reports that Malden Charter School served detention slips to two students, Deanna and Mya Scot, for wearing box braids. The students were also pulled from their school sports teams and told they were not allowed to attend prom.

If passed, H.B. 5436 will ensure protection against discrimination based on hairstyles by prohibiting local and regional boards of education from adopting policies that discriminate against students based on natural hair and hairstyles. This legislation is critical to ensure that girls are treated fairly and respectfully to obtain equitable education and opportunities at school.

Afrocentric hairstyles should not be considered unprofessional or a distraction. Women and girls of color need protection against discrimination on the basis of natural hair styles and textures. CWEALF urges the committee to support H.B. 5436.

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