



Why We Need HB 439 – Pennsylvania’s CROWN Act

A Pennsylvania CROWN Act will eliminate current illegal racism in schools and create supportive learning environments where students’ racial and cultural identities are celebrated and affirmed instead of rejected and penalized.

Claire* is an enthusiastic kindergarten student who wears her hair in an afro who could not have been more excited to start school! Sadly, her mom’s heart broke when Claire’s teacher sent her pictures of Claire with her head hung low and tears in her eyes after her classmates made fun of her for her hair texture and for wearing her hair in an afro. This experience made Claire fearful of attending school and made her feel rejected and unwelcome for wearing her hair in a style that once made her feel beautiful and special.

As a senior in high school, **Jadah*** was awarded a college scholarship and had dreams of teaching one day. However, weeks before graduation, Jadah faced expulsion because she wore her hair in locs created using extensions. If not for legal intervention by ELC attorneys, Jadah would have been excluded from school and may have been prevented from even attending college simply because her school policies permitted students to be expelled for their hairstyle.

Imani*, a middle school student represented by a Black attorney at ELC, was delighted to see that her attorney had long box braids created using extensions. She told her attorney that she had never met an attorney who looked like her before and how important this was to her. Prior to this encounter, she always believed that lawyers could not have braids and she wasn’t sure she could either because her mom had been fired from her job for having braids, even though this was against her employer’s policies.

Stella* was told to remove her hair bonnet while in school, but she was too embarrassed to take it off in front of her mostly white peers because her hair was not styled in a way that she was comfortable showing in public and she feared bullying. Her mother was called to pick her up and Stella missed class time. As a

*Pseudonyms are used to protect client confidentiality.

single mom, her mother could not afford to get her daughter's hair styled all the time, and therefore her daughter's bonnet was critical to attending school.

Ty, Sophia, and Allie* were good friends in middle school. But they all missed class time repeatedly when they were punished for wearing head wraps. **Allie's** aunt crocheted a "snood," an open knitted hair accessory that holds back hair and keeps it neat without tearing or damaging hair. **Sophia** handcrafted her head wrap: a silk scarf wrapped around the front of her hair and knotted in the back using yarn in an open headed headband. **Ty** was "dress-coded" for a head wrap used to hold her hair back. It had cancer ribbons on it that her grandmother gave to her. Ty pointed out that on the same day she was being excluded from class, a white student who wore a red bandana wrapped around her head and knotted in the back received no punishment at all.

All three students missed valuable instruction time. They were removed from class and made to sit in a school office until they were picked up. Because Allie's mother did not drive, she had to wait for her aunt to finish work. Different teachers issued punishments on different days, resulting in significant lost instruction time for each student over the school year. These students wanted to learn, and instead they were punished and deprived of learning due to the texture of their hair.

We need a CROWN Act for these students and thousands of other Pennsylvania schoolchildren whose stories have yet to be shared.