



Labor & Employment @lert

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Cuyahoga County Expands Anti-Discrimination Protections Under CROWN Act

Following a 10-1 vote, the Cuyahoga County Council has adopted the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act, making Cuyahoga County the first in Ohio to prohibit discrimination based on natural hair texture and protective hairstyles. Effective November 13, 2025, the CROWN Act classifies discrimination based on hair texture or styles commonly associated with a particular race or national origin, such as tightly coiled or curled hair, braids, locs, cornrows, twists, Bantu knots, Afros and other textured or natural styles, as a form of racial discrimination. The law applies countywide to employment, housing and public accommodations, but does not extend to local school districts. The Cuyahoga County Human Rights Commission will enforce the ordinance through investigations, mediations, hearings and civil penalties.

Ohio Legislative Landscape

Ohio has not yet enacted a statewide CROWN Act. In August 2025, House Bill 415 was introduced to prohibit hair discrimination in Ohio schools, and it remains under committee review, marking the fourth attempt to pass similar protections in the Ohio House. The Ohio Senate has also considered proposals focused on CROWN.

Several Ohio cities, including Akron, Cincinnati, Columbus and Newburgh Heights, have already adopted CROWN-style protections, while Cleveland Heights has formally supported statewide legislation. Cuyahoga County's new ordinance aligns with this growing local and regional momentum.

Federal and National Developments

At the federal level, the CROWN Act was reintroduced in February 2025 and is currently under House committee review. A prior version of the federal CROWN Act passed the U.S. House in 2022 but stalled in the Senate.

Nationwide, CROWN protections continue to expand. California became the first state to pass the CROWN Act in 2019, and as of late October 2025, 26 states and the District of Columbia have enacted similar laws. Arizona has also implemented CROWN-style protections through a gubernatorial executive order covering the state's executive branch.

Steps for Employers

Employers operating in Cuyahoga County, or in jurisdictions with similar CROWN Act laws, should promptly review their workplace policies, practices and training programs to ensure compliance. The most common areas of risk are dress codes and grooming standards that, while facially neutral, may disproportionately affect protected hairstyles and textures.

Employers may continue to enforce legitimate health and safety requirements, provided those standards are neutral, narrowly tailored and applied consistently.

More specifically, to comply with the CROWN Act, Cuyahoga County employers and those in locales with similar laws should:

- **Review and revise** appearance, grooming and dress-code policies to ensure they do not prohibit or restrict natural hair textures or protective styles. Remove any language that implicitly targets culturally associated hairstyles.
- **Adopt neutral** measures where sanitation or safety considerations are necessary, such as hairnets, caps, ties or other protective gear, rather than bans on certain lengths, textures or styles.
- **Train HR professionals, supervisors and interviewers** on anti-bias principles, emphasizing how “professionalism” standards can be discriminatorily applied and how to enforce neutral safety standards consistently.
- **Update handbooks, anti-discrimination policies and onboarding** materials to reflect hair-based discrimination prohibitions and include clear reporting channels for related concerns or complaints.
- **Ensure consistent, documented enforcement** of any remaining appearance standards and confirm that any hair-related requirements are truly job-related.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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