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**Testimony of Doni Crawford, Policy Analyst
at the Public Hearing on the
Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act of 2020
Committee on Government Operations
November 18, 2020**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Todd and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Doni Crawford, and I am a policy analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute (DCFPI). DCFPI is a non-profit organization that promotes budget choices to address DC's racial and economic inequities and to build widespread prosperity in the District of Columbia, through independent research and policy recommendations.

I'm here today to express my strong support for the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act of 2020, which would prohibit race-based hair discrimination. I want to also recommend changing the name of the new hair definition from "protective hair style" to "natural hair style."

This Bill Is Personal for Me and Calls for Dismantling Structures of White Supremacy

Last week, the Council passed landmark legislation to incorporate racial equity as a key focus of DC government, as envisioned in the Racial Equity Achieves Results (REACH) Amendment Act of 2020.¹ Councilmember Nadeau accurately remarked in her CROWN Act press release that this prioritization requires the Council to assess even the District's most basic policies, to ensure that they are racially inclusive and that workplaces are more welcoming.² By broadening and intentionally naming hair styles protected from discrimination to include braids, locs, afros, twists, etc., this bill would also help dismantle structures of white supremacy.

This bill is personal for me. Growing up, society programmed me to believe that straight, non-textured hair and its proximity to whiteness would be the quickest way for Black people to gain acceptance and economic security. Despite its damaging effect on my hair, I straightened and eventually chemically straightened my hair regularly, but especially for special occasions from school picture days and graduations to birthday parties and Easter services. That I felt the need to alter the natural state of my hair was deeply rooted in the legacy of enslavement when white enslavers preferred and valued enslaved women with lighter skin and straighter hair – often the direct result of these women being raped and terrorized by their enslavers on the plantation.³

This is not just a state of mind or a baseless insecurity. Black women's hair is 3.4 times more likely to be perceived as unprofessional than non-Black women's hair and Black women are 80 percent more likely than those women to feel they have to change their hair from its natural state to fit in at work, according to a Dove/JOY Collective research study from last year.⁴ Although I have worn my hair in natural hair styles like afro puffs, braids, and twist outs for eight years, I still briefly considered

removing my long braids in favor of a more “professional” natural bun when I interviewed at DCFPI for my first white employer. Fortunately, I did not – and today, I’m happy to be testifying at a formal hearing wearing my hair in my favorite protective style that has occasionally been deemed “unprofessional” by non-employers.

Recommendation for CROWN Act Improvement

I have one recommendation for bill improvement. As written, the definition of “protective hair style” includes afros and curls which are not protective styles. I recommend changing the classification to “natural hair style” which can then include all hairstyles listed – braids, cornrows, locs, afros, curls, twists, and knots. This category – natural hair style - will still prohibit race-based hair discrimination because existing language defines it as, “a hair style necessitated by, or resulting from, the immutable characteristics of a hair texture associated with race” and specifically names the aforementioned hairstyles.

Additionally, based on the DC Code, this new paragraph should likely be entitled 22A not 25A.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ Council of the District of Columbia, [Racial Equity Achieves Change Amendment Act of 2020](#), B23-0038, Final Reading November 10, 2020.

² Office of Brianne K. Nadeau, [Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau Introduces CROWN Act](#), October 5, 2020.

³ Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps. *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*. St. Martin’s Griffin, 2014. [Chapter 1](#) – Black Hair in Bondage, 1400-1899.

⁴ Dove/JOY Collective, [The CROWN Research Study](#), 2019.