# Pittsburgh And Allegheny County CROWN Acts Prohibit Hairstyle Discrimination

Insights
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The Pittsburgh City Council and Allegheny County Council recently passed new bills referred to as "CROWN" Acts, prohibiting discrimination based on hairstyle as to employment, housing, and educational opportunities. CROWN stands for "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair." These bills, one City-wide and one County-wide, are substantially identical. The County-wide law became effective October 22 and the City-wide law followed the next day. What do Pittsburgh-area employers need to know about these new laws?

**What Do These Laws Do?**
The CROWN Acts amend the City and County codes addressing discrimination to specifically add "hairstyles and protective and cultural hair textures and hairstyles," including, but not limited to, "braids, cornrows, locs, Bantu knots, Afros, and twists." The Pittsburgh and Allegheny County bills follow the national trend of cities and states passing similar laws, including New York, New Jersey and California.

Black individuals have, at times, been treated unfairly in the workplace and elsewhere based on hairstyles such as locs or twists. Prior to the CROWN Acts, individuals who believed they were discriminated against based on their hairstyle sought legal relief had to pursue their claim as one based on their race, skin color, national origin, or religion. From a legal perspective, making the link from hairstyle to these other protected characteristics has proven to be challenging. Now, individuals have legal recourse based specifically upon discrimination due to their hairstyle, regardless of whether they have viable claims based on other legally protected characteristics.

**What Should Employers Do?**
Pittsburgh-area employers should take the following steps to come into compliance and avoid potential litigation:

- Review the wording of your employee appearance policies and remove references to specifically prohibited hairstyles;
- Apply policies equally to all employees regardless of race;
- Educate employees on all policies, including the appearance policy;
- Train managers on any changes in policies and on how to handle appearance policy infractions

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with sensitivity; and

- Train any individuals responsible for hiring not to comment on an applicant's appearance and on appropriate interview questions and comments.

## *Related People*

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## *Related Offices*

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