

# PENNSYLVANIA BANS DISCRIMINATION BASED ON HAIRSTYLES AND HEAD COVERINGS: EMPLOYER FAQs ON PA'S NEW CROWN ACT

Insights  
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Pennsylvania just became the latest state to enact hair-based antidiscrimination protections in the workplace and beyond, and employers must get familiar with new rules before they take effect in January. We'll answer your top questions and offer practical steps you should consider taking now to ensure compliance and avoid potential litigation.

## What is the CROWN Act?

Gov. Josh Shapiro signed a bill ([HB 439](#)) into law on November 25 known the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act. The new law amends the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act (PHRA) – which applies to employers with at least four employees in the state (subject to limited exceptions) – to explicitly ban discrimination based on an individual's hair type or style if it is historically tied to their race or religion.

## What's the larger context?

More than half the states across the US have enacted their own versions of the CROWN Act, and similar protections have been in place for years in pockets of Pennsylvania (such as in the cities of Philadelphia or [Pittsburgh](#)). According to a recent [press release](#) from Shapiro's office, 916 complaints filed with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission in 2022 alone "related to racial discrimination involving hair texture and protective hairstyles."

## When does Pennsylvania's CROWN Act take effect?

## Related People



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The new law takes effect on **January 24, 2026** (60 days after its enactment).

### **How does this impact race discrimination under the PHRA?**

The CROWN Act updates the PHRA, which prohibits workplace discrimination based on race, to clarify that “race” encompasses “traits historically associated with the individual’s race” – including hair texture and protective hairstyles, such as locs, braids, twists, coils, Bantu knots, afros, and extensions.

### **How does this impact religious discrimination under the PHRA?**

The CROWN Act updates the PHRA, which also prohibits workplace discrimination based on religious creed, to clarify that “religious creed” includes “head coverings and hairstyles historically associated with religious creeds.”

### **Are there any exceptions for workplace health, safety, or other valid reasons?**

Yes. Employers may adopt and enforce rules and policies that impact traits historically associated with an individual’s race, or that impact head coverings or hairstyles historically associated with an individual’s religion, so long as the employer can demonstrate that the rule or policy is:

- **necessary to protect the health or safety** of an employee or other materially connected person;
- adopted for **nondiscriminatory reasons**;
- **specifically tailored** to the applicable position and activity; and
- **applied equally** to individuals whose positions fall under that position and activity.

The CROWN Act also makes clear that the new law does not prohibit an employer from adopting and enforcing an otherwise valid workplace policy to prevent a hostile work environment, so long as it is adopted for nondiscriminatory reasons and is applied equally.

### **How does the exception described above impact religious accommodation requests?**

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Employers may not deny a religious accommodation request related to a workplace rule or policy solely because it is lawful under the CROWN Act's four-part test described above. Employers still must evaluate religious accommodation requests under existing PHRA and Title VII standards and follow the interactive process.

### **What should employers do now?**

Ahead of the January 24 effective date, employers subject to the PHRA should familiarize themselves with the CROWN Act, update their policies and procedures (including job descriptions), and train their HR teams and managers on the new rules.

Employers should pay particular attention to uniform and grooming policies that use broad descriptors like "neat" or "well-groomed" when referring to hair, as subjective language may be more carefully scrutinized for underlying bias. Any restriction involving hairstyles, hair texture, or head coverings should be carefully reviewed to ensure it is tied to a legitimate business, safety, or health-related need and does not inadvertently impact styles or coverings historically associated with a protected race or religion.

When training managers, it's also important to emphasize that even well-intentioned feedback can inadvertently create risk for a discrimination claim.

### **Conclusion**

We will continue to monitor developments related to the CROWN Act and all aspects of workplace law, so make sure you subscribe to [Fisher Phillips' Insight System](#) to get the most up-to-date information. If you have questions, contact your Fisher Phillips attorney, the authors of this Insight, or any attorney in our [Philadelphia office](#) or our [Pittsburgh office](#).