

logo not found or type unknown

Puerto Rico Enacts Law Banning Discrimination Against Natural Afro-Textured Hairstyles

Governor Pierluisi's landmark bill protects styles such as afros, locs, and cornrows, ensuring equality for Afro-Caribbean community in public and private institutions

Caribbean / **Published On August 06, 2024 06:35 AM /**

Janeka Simon **August 06, 2024**

Image not found or type unknown



Puerto Rico's Governor Pedro Pierluisi recently signed into law a landmark bill banning discrimination against those who opt to wear their unprocessed, Afro-textured hair in styles such as afros, locs, twists, cornrows and curls.

Senate Bill 1282 applies to all private and public institutions, requiring all establishments to tailor their policies and regulations to comply with the new mandate. The legislation comes after more than three years of effort from several grass-roots organizations.?

At a public hearing in January, lawmakers heard from members of Puerto Rico's Afro-Caribbean community how exhausting it is to deal with the constant scrutiny and derision that comes from choosing to wear their hair in its natural state. "I'm very disappointed with a system that pushes us to change the hair with which we're born," said Julia Llanos Bultrón, a 23-year old teacher who styles her hair in cornrows. She recounted receiving a job offer predicated on her cutting her hair. She declined the opportunity.

A mother described how one of her sons was banned from two schools because of his Afro, until he chose to cut it. "It was one of the worst experiences we've had as a family," said Lorraine León Ramírez. She said that it was unfair for children in Puerto Rico to grow up in a system that undermines their identity. "It's time to break these stigmas," she declared.

After the bill was signed into law, nonprofit community facilitator Welmo Romero Joseph called it a "victory for generations to come," recounting his own experience with being forced to cut his hair by a high school principal. "I was a 4.0 student. What did that have to do with my hair?" Mr. Joseph asked.?

Approximately 230,000 of Puerto Rico's 3.2 million residents identify as Black, while an additional 1.6 million inhabitants classify themselves as multi-racial, according to national census data. According to the new law, "people identified as black or Afro descendant in Puerto Rico still face derogatory treatment, deprivation of opportunities, marginalization, exclusion and all kinds of discrimination" – exactly the kind of treatment legislation hopes to bring to an end.

Mr. Romero warned however, that now the state needs to employ measures to ensure that the provisions of the law are being followed.