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Senate Committee on Federal & State Affairs | 144-S
Written & Oral Testimony for Senate Bill 36
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To: Chairman Thompson and Members of the Senate Federal & State Affairs Committee

I bring you greetings from Lawrence, KS - home of two of our state's finest academic and athletic institutions - Haskell Indian Nations University and The University of Kansas. I rise in support of **SB36 - Amending the definition of ancestry in the Kansas Act Against Discrimination to include traits historically associated with ancestry, including hair texture and protective hairstyles**. This pivotal piece of legislation will unequivocally send a message to businesses, employers, and individuals across the state that hair does not define the value and worth of Black people.

In 1961...that's 63 years ago (and three years before the passage of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964), The City of Lawrence established ORD. 3161, our Civil Rights (Human Relations) Code - Kansas's oldest and most robust civil rights municipal code.

In 2014, I transitioned to wearing my hair naturally. At the time, I was working for an engineering firm in the private sector. Regrettably, this choice became a frequent topic of undue attention, leading to subtle and overt critiques and comments from staff. When the company's VP, without permission, ran his hands through my hair and commented, "I don't know how you can sit through such a process," I knew I needed to share how inappropriate and unprofessional the exchange was.

My story is far from unique. Abundant data supports the lived experiences of Black women, men, and children who are often pressured to align with unrealistic beauty and professionalism standards. This data sheds light on the profound and personal economic costs and challenges Black people encounter when they boldly embrace their cultural identity. If Kansas wants to continue to be an economic development competitor in this region that grows and recruits strong talent, we must ensure our policies, people, and practices reflect equal and equitable prosperity and economic security.

As the first Black woman to serve on the Lawrence City Commission, not only do I take great pride in sharing a piece of my ancestral identity each week with my city, I believe it is my duty as a policymaker to advocate for effective, robust policies that remain unaddressed due to lack of representation. Today, you can be that beacon of light for Black Kansans in our state, and I stand committed to seeking statewide legislation concerning this imperative issue.

Your actions today will be instrumental in elevating crucial conversations around SB 36; I am profoundly grateful for that. Thank you, Chair Thompson and committee members, for playing an invaluable role in this landmark moment, and I appreciate you further elevating legislation from conversation to action. I ardently hope you will continue collaborating with local leaders and community organizations to pass SB 36 favorably out of committee.

Kind Regards,



Commission Amber Sellers
City of Lawrence, KS

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