

Pennsylvania Passes CROWN Act to Take Effect in 2026

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Pennsylvania governor Josh Shapiro signed into law the “Creating a Respectful and Open World for National Hair” (CROWN) Act on November 25, 2025. The CROWN Act is an amendment to the Pennsylvania Human Rights Act. Specifically, the CROWN ACT expands the definitions in the PHRA as follows:

- The term “race” now includes “traits historically associated with the individual’s race, including hair texture and protective hairstyles.”
- The term “protective hairstyles” includes, but is not limited to hairstyles such as locs, braids, twists, coils, Bantu knots, afros and extensions.
- The term “religious creed” now includes head coverings and hairstyles historically associated with religious creed.

The Pennsylvania CROWN Act aligns with 27 other states that have adopted similar CROWN Act protections. Although the CROWN Act is similar to that of other states, it is not identical. Each state law should be consulted as applicable (other recent additions include Texas, Michigan, and Minnesota).

There are certain carve outs under the CROWN Act. Employers may adopt and enforce legitimate workplace health and safety rules or bona fide occupational qualifications. If workplace policy or rule impacts either race or religious creed as defined in the CROWN Act, the employer must demonstrate all of the following:

- The health or safety of an employee or other materially connected person will be impaired without the rule or policy.
- The rule or policy is adopted for nondiscriminatory reasons.
- The rule or policy is specifically tailored to the applicable position or activity.
- The rule or policy is applied equally to individuals whose positions fall under the applicable position or activity.

The CROWN Act takes effect on January 24, 2026. Employers should plan to implement measures to comply with the CROWN Act prior to the January 24, 2026 effective date. Some considerations for implementation of the CROWN Act include reviewing policies to remove restrictions that directly or indirectly target hairstyles or religious coverings (unless falling within the aforementioned carve out), reviewing workplace conduct policies to ensure they prohibit discrimination on the basis of race (including but not limited to conduct directed at hairstyles or religious coverings), and training managers, supervisors, and others in supervisory roles on the updated CROWN Act. Employers should also review CROWN Acts in the other 27 states with similar laws to ensure compliance where employees are located.

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