

HAIR DISCRIMINATION SCRIPT

wm_hairdiscrimination_042919

TRT :5:00

Lede:

We often hear about racial discrimination and gender discrimination, but lately, it's been hair discrimination making the news. Wilko Martinez reports.

New York City recently moved to ban hair discrimination. New guidelines are set to be enacted that prevent employers from unfairly targeting people, mostly those of black origin, due to their natural hair.

huq_hairdiscrimination_042919

TRT:23

"One of the things that's been happening under the law is that individuals who wear braids or locks, who are typically identified as part of being African-American or black culture, were being discriminated against in their jobs. How? They were saying to either cut or change... they weren't given jobs."

That was Chaumtoli Huq, a human rights lawyer and labor and unemployment expert that works at the CUNY School of Law. Huq explains that, in the U.S., federal laws are often very different from city laws. The federal law did not see hair discrimination as racial discrimination, so the New York City Commission on Human Rights moved to fix that in their city with a new law.

huq_hairdiscrimination_042919

TRT:15

"It doesn't create a new category for protection. It clarifies if you discriminate someone based on their hair and they were very specific, that's also considered race discrimination."

The new law mostly deals with hair discrimination at work. Carlita Field-Hernandez, a 26-year-old with Afro-Latina roots, is one of the many with natural hair who has faced hair discrimination.

carlita_hairdiscrimination_042919

TRT:16

"I applied for this job and I could tell right off the bat. They had an impression of me because of how my hair was even though I was dressed properly, I was speaking eloquently and stuff, and I knew they had an issue with my hair."

Field-Hernandez was applying for a job at a local restaurant. She got turned down. A few months later, she applied again out of curiosity. This time, her hair was not in cornrows.

carlita_hairdiscrimination_042919

TRT:15

"I had the sit down interview and they said for me to work, like "can you start today?" It was only a couple months difference. I had no extra experience. There was nothing that changed in me except my hair."

Field-Hernandez was not always given problems for her hair.

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TRT:12

"When I was little, my hair was dead straight. I had really thick, dead straight hair. And then when I was seven or eight, my hair just changed."

And when her hair changed, everything changed. Field-Hernandez initially put her hair in box braids, a popular hairstyle at the time due to African-American singer Alicia Keys. When she went to school with her new hair, she started being bullied.

carlita_hairdiscrimination_042919

TRT:12

"I remember going into school with my new box braids, feeling like I like how I looked and I looked really good. Then, I remember being at my locker and hearing these girls go like, 'Oh my god, she looks so ghetto.'"

Things got even worse when she enrolled at Ward Melville High School in Long Island.

carlita_hairdiscrimination_042919

TRT:19

"When my hair was big and stuff like that, I had a woman that I'm never gonna get a boyfriend unless I straighten my hair. I had a kid in my economics class straight up say to me, in front of a teacher, 'did your parents swim over, tail over, or hop over?'"

Field-Hernandez has now graduated both high school and college, but hair discrimination at schools is still a big issue. Chaumtoli Huq's son wears his hair in an afro and he constantly receives comments at his high school.

huq_hairdiscrimination_042919

TRT:25

"Everyone seems to really fuss around his hair. The teachers oftentimes have comments, 'Oh, I can't see through his face.' Some of these things seem really like they would be not as serious, but why are we so fixated on someone's body parts? It feels so invasive."

Huq believes that, although the new guidelines will help ban discrimination in the workplace, they won't do much to fix the social stigma and bias around natural hair.

huq_hairdiscrimination_042919

TRT:10

"The law can't really make you be a nice person unfortunately, so it's a very specific context."

Field-Hernandez also thinks the new law won't do much. She feels like solving the problem isn't that simple.

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TRT:9

"You get people when they're younger, you show them, you make them aware or whatever, and then hopefully, as time goes on, it will be eliminated."

Huq agrees, but she also says the awareness around this issue will increase with the rise of public figures like Congress member Ayanna Pressley or actress Yara Shahidi. Huq thinks that culture is definitely changing, but until everyone catches up, this is what Field-Hernandez would say to those who still face hair discrimination.

carlita_hairdiscrimination_042919

TRT:16

"Fuck them, you do you. You are not wrong. You are do not anything wrong. You are just being yourself and just prove them wrong. You just keep shining. You wear whatever you want, you dress however you want, you do your hair however the fuck you want, and you prove them wrong. You keep succeeding."

In addition to New York City, California has also started taking on hair discrimination, with the California Senate approving a law similar to New York City's last week. It remains to be seen if other cities and states follow suit.