

Thank you Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, Members of the Committee:

My name is Casey Kopcho and I'm here to support the CROWN Act. Oregon, like the rest of the U.S., is shrouded in a legacy partially defined by the objectification, heinous mistreatment, and systematic marginalization of Black people. And now we have a bill before us today that represents but one very small step on the arc of the moral universe.

Here we are, over 400 years after the first enslaved Africans were forcefully taken to Jamestown, slaves whose heads were shaved to remove signs of their culture, we find ourselves gathered talking about passing a law to help protect Black folks from discrimination based on physical characteristics historically associated with their race. The very fact this conversation has to take place at all is emblematic of the systemic racism and privilege still endemic in society to this day. People are still denied employment, fired, taunted, ostracized--you've heard some of their stories this morning. Children are bullied (sometimes by teachers) or forced to cut their hair to participate in activities. The trauma we continue to inflict on the Black population is pervasive and needs to come to an end.

Now, I won't pretend to believe that the passage of this bill will manifest itself in a sudden societal transformation, or in healing the malice that has corrupted the hearts of so many. But the bill remains a critical step in establishing protections for individuals who are perpetually targeted just for existing at all. We've passed laws to protect people from race-based discrimination before but the edifice of racism always manages to find a way to exploit the system and marginalize the Black population.

This isn't the first time we've had this conversation and it surely won't be the last. Whether or not we admit it, we continue to oppress the descendants of the people who built this country. People who disproportionately enlist to serve in the armed forces and fight for this country. People who disproportionately lost, and continue to lose, loved ones from COVID-19 because they make up more front-line workers. To continue to oppress the Black population in any way is morally reprehensible and flies in the face of the Lockean beliefs on which our nation was founded. I urge you all to move swiftly to unanimously support this bill.