

## What You Need to Know About Hair Discrimination



Photo credit: Andre D. Wagner

**In New York City, you have the right to express your racial, religious, and cultural identity through your hair.** Hair discrimination occurs when people are treated less well than others because of the way they wear their hair. The NYC Commission on Human Rights recognizes hair discrimination as a form of race discrimination and/or religious discrimination. Discriminatory policies related to hair exacerbate social, economic, and educational inequality by reducing access to employment, educational, and other opportunities based on a person's race or religion. Such policies can also reinforce harmful stereotypes that are rooted in racism or religious bias about what is considered "normal," "attractive," or "professional."

*The New York City Human Rights Law prohibits discrimination based on hair texture, style, length, or the use of head coverings that are commonly associated with a particular racial group or religious group.*

### 5 Things You Should Know:

- **You Can Wear Your Hair How You Like:** Hair discrimination means being treated less well than others due to your hair texture, style (e.g., braids, twists, cornrows, fades), length, or use of a head covering (e.g., hijab, yarmulke). Hair discrimination is prohibited under the NYC Human Rights Law.
- **It's Not Just the Hair on Your Head:** Discrimination or harassment for your facial or body hair may be prohibited under the NYC Human Rights Law.
- **Other People's Opinions Don't Limit Your Rights:** Customer preference or other personal beliefs that certain types of hair, hairstyles, or other hair practices are "unprofessional" or "distracting" are no excuse for unlawful discrimination based on hair.
- **Exceptions Must Be Justified:** In some situations, restrictions or policies on hair may be due to legitimate safety concerns. In these situations, employers or providers of public accommodation must consider alternatives to blanket policies. Alternatives include using hair ties, hair nets, head coverings, or other safety equipment.
- **Employers Must Provide Reasonable Accommodations for Religious Practices:** Absent an undue hardship, employers must provide reasonable accommodations in employment for hair styles, textures, or head coverings worn as part of a religious practice or tradition.

### Examples of Hair Discrimination:

- An employer denies an employee with a natural hair style the opportunity to work in a customer-facing role unless that employee changes their hair style.
- A public school athletic association allows white student athletes with long hair to tie their hair up while competing but bars a Black student athlete with locs that fall below their shoulders from competing at all.
- A bouncer at a bar denies entry to a patron wearing a turban based on the bar's "no headwear" policy.

Read the Commission's [rules](#) and [legal enforcement guidance](#) to learn more.

For more information or to file a complaint, call **212-416-0197**, or visit our website at **NYC.gov/ReportDiscrimination**.