

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 14, 2022

8:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky
Representative Grier Hopkins
Representative Mike Prax
Representative Mike Cronk
Representative Ronald Gillham

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 312

"An Act relating to dress codes and natural hairstyles."

- HEARD & HELD

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 36(EDC)

"An Act relating to reporting requirements of the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 108

"An Act relating to concurrent vocational education, training, and on-the-job trade experience programs for students enrolled in public secondary schools; relating to child labor; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 48

"An Act relating to the Alaska performance scholarship program."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 350

"An Act relating to school bond debt reimbursement; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 312

SHORT TITLE: ALLOW NATURAL HAIRSTYLES

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) TARR

02/09/22	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/09/22	(H)	EDC, L&C
03/11/22	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
03/11/22	(H)	Scheduled but Not Heard
03/14/22	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: SB 36

SHORT TITLE: U OF A REGENTS REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) STEVENS

01/25/21	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
01/25/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/25/21	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/08/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/08/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/08/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/17/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/17/21	(S)	Moved CSSB 36(EDC) Out of Committee
03/17/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/19/21	(S)	EDC RPT CS 5DP SAME TITLE
03/19/21	(S)	DP: HOLLAND, HUGHES, STEVENS, MICCICHE, BEGICH
03/22/21	(S)	FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
03/22/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/22/21	(S)	MINUTE(FIN)
03/29/21	(S)	FIN RPT CS(EDC) 3DP 1NR
03/29/21	(S)	DP: STEDMAN, BISHOP, WIELECHOWSKI
03/29/21	(S)	NR: WILSON
03/29/21	(S)	FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
03/29/21	(S)	Moved CSSB 36(FIN) Out of Committee
03/29/21	(S)	MINUTE(FIN)
04/07/21	(S)	TRANSMITTED TO (H)
04/07/21	(S)	VERSION: CSSB 36(EDC)
04/09/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/09/21	(H)	EDC, STA
03/14/22	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 312.

DAVID SONG, Staff
Representative Geran Tarr
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Representative Tarr, prime sponsor, gave a sectional analysis of HB 312.

WENDY GREENE, Professor of Law
Thomas R Kline School of Law
Drexel University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 312.

ROZLYN GRADY-WYCHE, Vice President
Alaska Coalition of BIPOC Educators
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 312.

ALYSSA QUINTYNE, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 312.

MORGAN LIM, Lobbyist
Government Affairs Manager
Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 312.

LISA RUSH
Alaska Black Caucus
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 312.

JACQUELINE RAY, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 312.

PHIL MOSER, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 312.

MARKITA WYCHE, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 312.

DANYELLE KIMP, President
Alaska Coalition of BIPOC Educators
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 312.

NORIA CLARK, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition of HB 312.

DAVID NEES, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition of HB 312.

ROSALYN CAROL WYCHE, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 312.

SENATOR GARY STEVENS
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented CSSB 36 (EDC).

PAUL LAYER, PhD, Vice President
Academics, Students, and Research
University of Alaska System
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on
CSSB 36 (EDC).

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:05:13 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR ANDI STORY called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Representatives Drummond, Cronk, Gillham, Prax, Hopkins, and Story were present at the call to order. Representative Zulkosky arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 312-ALLOW NATURAL HAIRSTYLES

[8:06:34 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 312, "An Act relating to dress codes and natural hairstyles."

[8:06:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 312. She stated that the proposed legislation would prohibit schools and workplaces from enacting dress codes that would restrict individuals from wearing their natural hair. She recalled that she presented to the House Education Standing Committee on school climate and connectedness, noting that students' academic achievement improves when they feel welcome and included in their school environment. She suggested that HB 312 is important as it would improve school climate across Alaska. She stated the legislation would ensure that no employee or student would be prohibited from work or school for wearing a natural hairstyle. She argued that the legislation defines which standards are unacceptable for schools and employers to place on hair and provides clarity for school districts in a policy statement. She stated that 14 states and 34 municipalities across the country have adopted these policies. She cited that the national version of the legislation is the CROWN Act, which is sponsored by the soap company, Dove. She suggested it would be great if Alaska could join others in passing a policy like this.

[8:09:41 AM](#)

DAVID SONG, Staff, Representative Tarr, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Tarr, prime sponsor, gave a sectional analysis of HB 312 [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1: Adds a new section (.135. Dress code; natural hairstyles) to AS 14.03 (Title 14. Education, Libraries, and Museums, 03. Public Schools Generally)

This section disallows a school district from adopting a school dress code that prohibits a student from wearing a hairstyle that is commonly or historically associated with race, wearing a natural hairstyle regardless of the student's hair texture or type, or that requires a student to permanently or semi-permanently alter their natural hair.

This bill makes an exception to allow school districts to restrict hairstyles in any way necessary to comply with health or safety laws.

Section 2: Adds a new section (.450. Dress code; natural hairstyles) to AS 23.10 (Title 23. Labor and Workers Compensation 10. Employment Practices and Working Conditions)

This section is identical to section 1, except it deals with an employee and employer relationship rather than school and students.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, in response to Co-Chair Story, stated that there is a zero fiscal note, as the legislation would require compliance only from school districts.

[8:11:34 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY asked for an example of a policy that would restrict hair for health or safety.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR responded that working in a cafeteria would be an example, as all employees would be required to wear a hairnet, and a policy here would make sure hair does not get in the food. She added that some students work in the school cafeteria.

[8:12:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX voiced concern that the term "natural" in statute would be vague. He stated that the committee may understand the meaning relative to the current discussion, but in a larger context there may be confusion, especially to employers. He questioned whether there could be a better definition.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR referred to invited testimony to address this concern. She stated that Legislative Legal Services could also address the definition to provide clarity.

[8:13:40 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 8:13 a.m.

[8:13:56 AM](#)

WENDY GREENE, Professor of Law, Thomas R Kline School of Law, Drexel University, testified in support of HB 312. She thanked the bill sponsor for the opportunity and shared that she is one of the nation's leading antidiscrimination law scholars, specializing in grooming-code discrimination. She stated that over the past decade legal publications have circulated her work on the social construction of race and the contemporary operation of racial discrimination, and she is a co-drafter of the federal CROWN Act. She said that, on the state and municipal level, she serves as a legal advisor for cases on hair discrimination in workplaces and schools, supporting legislation like HB 312. She shared that she has devoted her career to activating reforms in legislation and enhancing public awareness around the harms of unchecked, discriminatory grooming policies. She stated that policies that denigrate African descendants often describe natural hairstyles as distracting, extreme, excessive, unkempt, and unprofessional. She referred to examples of natural hairstyles as locs, braids, twists, afros, and banshee knots. She provided the example of a manager telling a Black employee to "remove her braids or lose her job," as the woman's braids were too "ghetto."

MS. GREENE stated that grooming policies are often enforced to deprive African descendants of employment, education, housing, and access to public accommodation. She stated that African-descendant males have often been required to cut off their hair to keep a job, to receive a high school diploma, or to participate in sporting competitions. African-descendant females, while donning natural hairstyles, have been likewise deprived of opportunities, along with being subjected to heightened scrutiny and policing in disproportionate levels than counterparts. She stated that being subjected to this type of discipline and scrutiny in schools and workplaces affect emotional, psychological, and physical wellbeing. She stated that Black females, when faced with natural-hair bans, are required to either cut their hair or wear their hair straightened. She stated that straight-hair expectations are usually met with the use of toxic chemicals, extreme heat, wigs, and weaves. She described these methods as laborious and painful, as African-descendant females often suffer hair and scalp burns from chemical relaxers. Not only do they suffer pain, but the relaxers, wigs, weaves, and extreme heat may cause hair breakage, balding, and scalp disorders.

[8:18:17 AM](#)

MS. GREENE stated that research also indicates a potential correlation between hair-straightening products and the increased occurrence of uterine fibroids, hormone-related infertility, and aggressive forms of breast and uterine cancer. Natural-hair bans in workplaces and schools often leave African-descendant females in a "Catch-22" situation: either they wear natural hair at the risk of being deprived of opportunities for employment or education, or they wear straight hair at the risk of enduring consequential harm to their psychological or physiological wellbeing. She asserted that many Black females are put in this lawful bind under federal jurisprudence that resulted from a "hair-splitting" legal distinction created in the federal court. She stated that after the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, federal courts adopted what is known as the mutability doctrine. Due to this doctrine, she said, federal courts have repeatedly declared, for 40 years, that when an employer denies an African descendant a job because he/she adorns an afro, the employer engages in unlawful race discrimination; however, the moment the individual twists, locs, or braids the afro, and he/she suffers adverse treatment on these grounds, the employer's discrimination would be lawful. She stated that this is a pervasive form of racial discrimination that harkens back to the era of racial slavery in this country. She argued that HB 312 ensures that unjustifiable gaps in federal civil rights' protection does not exist in Alaska.

MS. GREENE stated that for many African descendants, donning natural hairstyles is a critical feature of racial or cultural identity, or simply how their hair grows. She continued that the legislation ensures clear protection by eliminating the possibility of being deprived an equal opportunity due to the expression of racial or cultural identity. She thanked the bill sponsors for advancing the civil rights legislation for all those who experience racial discrimination on the basis of characteristics associated with their racial or ethnic identity, such as skin complexion, hair texture, hairstyle, language, or accent. She continued that this is the policy stance "notably advanced by Alaska's Department of Administration for public employees." She urged committee members to support the legislation as it provides clear and effective statutory protection when these forms of discrimination occur in workplaces and schools.

[8:22:38 AM](#)

ROZLYN GRADY-WYCHE, Vice President, Alaska Coalition of BIPOC Educators, testified in support of HB 312. She shared that she graduated from high school in Anchorage and works as a paraprofessional at Mountain View Elementary School while pursuing a teacher certification. She stated she is the owner of a hair salon and a fourth-generation hair stylist. She also shared that she is the founder of the Alaska Coalition of BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] Educators. She stated that she supports the bill, as it reflects her personal experience in high school. In an effort to control a "bad hair day," she stated that the school administration sent her home for wearing a pink bandana in her hair. She related another personal story that, while recently at work, she complimented a kindergartener on her afro. She said that later the child's mother told her that the little girl did not like the hairstyle, but after the compliment at school, the kindergartener came home happy. She stated that image is important to students, and it starts early.

[8:26:54 AM](#)

MS. GRADY-WYCHE stated that during the history of slavery in the U.S. most African Americans styled their hair in an attempt to mimic the styles of White society. She stated that Black peoples' hair is characterized by texture and tightness and has been described as kinky, coarse, nappy, or like wool. These characteristics have led to negative views of kinky hair, which is the opposite of the European-American standard of beauty. She stated that, as a result, the practice of straightening Black hair gained popularity among African Americans. The process of straightening Black hair uses caustic relaxers that contain lye, which often damages hair and results in hair loss. She added that African slaves did not have the resources to practice hair grooming and used sheep-fleecing tools to detail their hair. She stated that they often suffered scalp disease and infection due to their living conditions and would use cornmeal on their scalp, shave their hair, or wear hats, as they were often expected to appear well groomed. The men sometimes would wear wigs to mimic their master's hairstyles, while women typically plaited or braided their hair. After slavery, Black people learned to use lard to moisturize the hair, hot butter knives to curl their hair, and lye to straighten their hair. She stated that kinky hair and the afro hairstyle in the 1960s represented a political statement synonymous with Black pride and beauty, and, by default, a fundamental tool in the Black power movement. She stated that the phrase "Black is beautiful" expresses an affirmation of African heritage, and wearing kinky

hair today embraces "one's natural self." She described that, since the late 20th century, the Black community has promoted the idea of identity with hairstyles as cornrows, locs, braids, hair spritz, short chopped, and kinky. She stated that, even though this expression of identity has been joyful, it is not celebrated in American culture. She voiced the opinion that disapproval of Black hairstyles is still present today. She expressed the concern that, due to the ideal of White beauty, reserved, straight hairstyles seem to be more accepted, while other styles face scrutiny. She expressed the idea that the White-beauty ideal is pervasive in everyday life, but more specifically the workplace and school. She described herself and her children as having natural hair. She offered her support of HB 312 because "Black is beautiful" and should be accepted.

[8:30:57 AM](#)

ALYSSA QUINTYNE, representing self, testified in support of HB 312. She thanked the community for the opportunity to testify and shared that many African Americans in Alaska suffer in silence due to discrimination. She stated that every Black acquaintance she has in Alaska has been harassed, sent home, and spoken to about their hair in the workplace. She shared that at school in Fairbanks teachers, administrators, and classmates put her "through the ringer." She stated that classmates and teachers would touch her hair without permission, and they would ask inappropriate questions about her hair's texture and odor. She stated that [due to her hair] the school barred her from participating in classes and sporting events. She added that other students physically harassed her by cutting, burning, and pulling her hair. She stated that her mother went to the school district about the harassment, but the school district did nothing "to address the ignorance and bigotry" of the teachers and administrators. She stated that there were never any amends "for the decades of harm they had to put up with from that district." With no other authority to consult, her mother finally threatened legal action. As a result, the district spoke with the teacher. She stated that afterwards she suffered retaliation from the teacher. She added that experiences as an adult in the workplace have been no better, except for her current job. She shared that a human resources department wrote a policy targeting her hairstyle, and she received the ultimatum in another job to "come to work with your hair straight or don't come at all." She indicated that she has worked many diverse jobs and has always worn her hair in reasonable styles as braids, twists, pressed hair, and plaits, and her hair always

fits into a hairnet, as needed. She shared that she has lived paycheck to paycheck as a young adult with few options.

MS. QUINTYNE stated that she has made attempts to address the problem in her community, beginning at 13 years old when she gave testimony "begging" the school board to change the dress code because it was discriminatory. She stated that for three years she served on the [North Star Borough School District Diversity Committee] and worked on the dress code for the entire district. She stated that she educated the committee and the school board about bonnets, doo rags, and gang affiliation, of which she described as "racial microaggression rooted in fear that targets Black and Brown students." She stated that she supplied resources and suggestions on the responsibility of the district concerning a student's financial access, culture, identity, and expression. She stated that she shared the idea about how language, such as "presentable" and "neat," reinforces a European beauty standard that does not apply to every student. She related the belief that her attempts were to no avail.

[8:37:35 AM](#)

MS. QUINTYNE expressed the belief that it is easier for people to dismiss and belittle children and young adults who experience hair discrimination. She stated that she has been told to stand up for herself, tell the teacher, or tell human resources; but the authority figures were the ones perpetuating the harm. She stated that the city council would not address the issue and referred to it as "a Lower 48 problem," and the borough assembly "threw their hands up" but then passed a Black Lives Matter resolution. She voiced the opinion that the assembly passed the resolution because "our lives are only as worthy as it is for them to be performative." She expressed the difficulty in understanding how young people are supposed to learn from a community and its adults when the authority figures are the source of pain and trauma, and the legislature and congress does nothing in response to a constituent who testifies and sends emails.

MS. QUINTYNE put forth the opinion that Black students [in Alaska] are unwelcome and unseen, but then they are told that there is not a racial problem. She expressed exhaustion and futility. She stated that when she shared HB 312 with people she has known for years, who have witnessed her struggle, they responded that they "didn't even know that was a problem." She expressed hope that the legislation would allow those who understand to teach others about the issue, as the legislation

would open the conversation on discrimination, microaggression, and lateral violence. She stated that, instead of waiting for marginalized communities to come forth and offer their trauma, legislators need to actually look at what is happening in their communities and make sure constituents are being protected the way that they exist, and not the way they are allowed to exist. Most importantly, she offered the hope that future Black children in Alaska would feel welcomed and respected by their peers and the adults in their lives, and they could grow up out of love, not survival.

[8:42:25 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX stated that he would like to understand how to define the conversation in law, so that people without the benefit of the committee's discussion could understand what is to be expected of them. He stated that "for some reason, throughout history, we have divided ourselves into groups that look like each other and talk like each other and act like each other and would like to remain separate." He stated that, as the population increases, there needs to be accommodation for everyone, and "we have to decide how to get along better". He expressed that there has to be a balance between individual recognition and conformity in a standard others have to accept.

[8:44:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TARR, responding to an earlier question from Representative Prax, referred to the language in the bill on page 1, lines 8-10. She stated that this language provides qualifiers to the definition of a natural hairstyle. She inquired whether these lines need more clarity. She indicated that this would be the stage to develop clarity, and any issues should be addressed now. She voiced the belief that the language of the bill is similar to what other states have done. She asked that Ms. Greene address this.

[8:45:09 AM](#)

MS. GREENE responded that the definition in HB 312 mirrors the federal and state legislation, but without the phrase "includes, but is not limited to". She advised if this language were included in the proposed legislation, it would not only provide a more expansive understanding of what constitutes a natural hairstyle, but also encompass individuals of different racial ethnic identities who may be experiencing this kind of discrimination.

[8:47:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX expressed the opinion that his question would be impossible to answer, as it is impossible to describe the different situations in which someone might find a hairstyle natural and acceptable. He continued that it also goes to the demeanor of the person and the context of the situation. He said that it would be very difficult to define by law, as a style may be natural to one person, while another might find it "aggressive and a threat." In example, he described a situation in Fairbanks where he and his son were walking along the street when they "encountered a gentleman that had geometric patterns tattooed on his face and dreadlocks that mimicked Bob Marley." He stated that the man looked "scary" and that he and his son went around him. He said, "We did not want to associate with him." He stated that he explained to his son that he would come across different situations not found at home, and that he would have to "learn to tolerate and accept this." He stated that, within a month, the same man with the tattoos and hairstyle came into the store he was managing to purchase a pair of Carhartt trousers. He stated that in this context "of me wanting to serve him and develop that relationship enough to meet his needs ... his hairstyle, his manner, and everything else was perfectly acceptable to me." He stated that seeing him on the street and not knowing him, "I felt threatened by his presence. That's the problem we run into."

MS. GREENE stated that HB 312 is important because it would address stereotypes affixed to people due to their hairstyles. She expressed hope that the legislation would diminish, if not eliminate, this stereotyping; therefore, the hairstyle would not serve as a barrier for any exchange or relationship. She stated that the crux of the issue is not what constitutes a natural hairstyle, but that the natural hairstyle is associated with social identity. To clarify, she posed the question: "Under what circumstances do you have to accommodate ... or do you have to ... accept an individual's expression of their racial or ethnic identity that may be shaped ... by certain types of biases that are conscious or unconscious in nature?"

[8:51:42 AM](#)

MS. QUINTYNE stated that Representative Prax's example is very similar to her experiences. She stated that the issue is not necessarily what people think about [African Americans], but it is when a person in a position of authority has a certain

perspective about [African Americans] and could dictate the outcome of a situation, such as a job interview or class. She expressed the belief that people's right to discern her, their opinion and perspective, would be more legally protected than her actual right to exist, the way that she exists. She argued that this is not just about hairstyles, but about [African Americans'] ability to keep their hair neat and healthy, as this often requires braids, locs, and other styles. If the hair of [African Americans] is not styled, she stated that it could mat and retain dirt more easily, so it becomes a matter of Black hygiene. She expressed the confidence that most people in the community can wash, condition, and detangle their hair and "call it good," but Black people have to do things differently. She said that they may have a certain hairstyle, not as a part of their spirituality and culture, but to help keep their body neat. She argued what would be more important - somebody's right to discern, or somebody's right to exist?

[8:54:22 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on HB 312.

[8:54:48 AM](#)

MORGAN LIM, Lobbyist, Government Affairs Manager, Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates, testified in support of HB 312. He stated that Planned Parenthood is committed to creating a world in which all people have autonomy over their own bodies and is in strong support of HB 312. He stated that dress codes that ban certain hairstyles perpetuate racist stereotypes. This could lead to over policing and disciplining people of color, effecting educational, professional, and physiological outcomes. He stated that Afrocentric and Indigenous hairstyles are expressions of identity that hold historical, cultural, and spiritual significance, and this serves to link historical and contemporary identities. The expression of identity through hairstyle also represents a rejection of Eurocentric ideas that the texture of White European hair is inherently professional and beautiful, while the texture and style of nonwhite hair is inherently unprofessional and undesirable. He continued that dress codes that imbed racial stereotypes into policy perpetuate a White supremacist's belief system and result in disciplinary discrimination against students and employees of color. He stated that research shows schools that enforce dress codes against Black students by policing hairstyles leads educators to discipline students of color more often than White students. He stated that this discipline results in the loss of class time,

which impacts graduation rates and access to higher education. He stated that Planned Parenthood strongly supports the legislation and urges the committee to move it forward.

[8:57:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX stated that he would like to show a photo to the committee. He made a comparison of the individual in the photo with Mr. Lim, stating that they both have a shaved-head hairstyle. He pointed out the person in the photo was wearing a different style of jacket and had a scowl on his face. He referenced the article attached to the photo that identified the man with the skinhead movement. He suggested that Mr. Lim dressed so as to make "an attempt to conform to what you would expect to find in this room." He questioned Mr. Lim on how to "tell the difference between him ... and you."

MR. LIM responded that the purpose of the bill would be that people are not judged by their hairstyles, but by their actions. If a person is a part of a certain movement, they would be judged on that. He stated that many people in the building have hairstyles similar to his, and they all seek to not be judged by that style.

[8:59:28 AM](#)

LISA RUSH, Alaska Black Caucus, testified in support of HB 312. She shared that the Alaska Black Caucus advocates for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color in their lives and livelihoods across Alaska. She stated that the organization is committed to eliminating all forms of racial prejudice, keeping the public aware of the adverse effects of racial, educational, political, and economic discrimination, and resolving to take all necessary action to secure and assure elimination of all forms of prejudices. She stated that history has shown implicit and explicit prejudices against natural hair deeply rooted in schools and workplaces. She asserted that the focus should be on the quality of the student or the employee, who should be able to wear his/her hair with pride and dignity. She stated that the Alaska Black Caucus supports legislation that prohibits policies that have a disparate impact on natural hairstyles closely related to race.

[9:01:21 AM](#)

JACQUELINE RAY, representing self, testified in support of HB 312.

[9:02:02 AM](#)

PHIL MOSER, representing self, testified in support of HB 312. Referencing [Native Alaskan] boarding schools, he stated that there has been a long history of discrimination in Alaska. He maintained that schools have often functioned as a place where Black and Indigenous children are disciplined, suspended, and expelled at much higher rates than the general population. He stated that these children may have a harder time later in life due to their treatment in school. He expressed the hope that the legislation would help prevent this.

[9:04:31 AM](#)

MARKITA WYCHE, representing self, testified in support of HB 312. She shared that she is an African-American woman and grew up in Alaska. She stated that she has experienced discrimination in school and at work. She explained that judgements are made about her character based on her hairstyle, and she expressed hope that children in the future would not have to experience this.

[9:06:03 AM](#)

DANYELLE KIMP, President, Alaska Coalition of BIPOC Educators, testified in support of HB 312. He shared that he is a retired military combat officer, a parent, and an African American male. He stated that he is a co-founding member of the Alaska Coalition of BIPOC Educators, and its mission is to champion equity in education for communities of color in order to achieve equality. He stated that HB 312 would be a remedy to a century-long problem of discrimination against Black people for their hair. He cited the incident when a local student had to fight to keep his hairstyle. He said in this fight, the student lost his heritage and his history. He referenced the unfair treatment that forces Black women to use relaxers on their hair. He said that natural, healthy hairstyles are expressions of Black heritage and history. He stated that microaggressions come in the form of the comment made earlier in the hearing by the legislator who expressed that "a man with locs was scary." He expressed the belief that people cannot change each other's perspective, but the legislation could help prevent discriminatory actions toward individuals. He shared that his son wears locs, so HB 312 would help protect him and other Black students. He stated that a few years ago the U.S. Military made necessary changes to its regulations to protect natural

hairstyles. He asserted that "if they can do it, then Alaska could do it too." He stated that the BIPOC educators and community need the bill, but most importantly the BIPOC students do.

9:10:32 AM

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX expressed the need to understand when it would be acceptable for someone to feel threatened [by a person's hairstyle]. He requested that, for the benefit of understanding, those testifying consider sending pictures of acceptable, natural hairstyles.

MR. KIMP responded that if someone is interested in something, he/she should do the research. He stated that the burden should not always be on people of color or people who have been historically oppressed. He stated that if a person is curious, he/she should meet some Black people to attain a better understanding of the issue.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX expressed interest in learning [about Black culture] but believed that there is miscommunication, and discussion is the best way to sort out the issue. He reasserted that there needs to be some sort of recognizable standards.

9:13:50 AM

CO-CHAIR STORY stated that she appreciated the honesty throughout the discussion. She opined that people grow by reflecting on thoughts they hold against others who are considered different. She stated that serving on the school board helped her be in touch with unconscious biases.

9:14:44 AM

NORIA CLARK, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 312. She stated that there are larger issues with youth that are familial and systematic. She shared that her heritage is Algerian and African American, and she is considered light complected. She stated that her mother taught her to be a strong woman and have confidence in life, but she experiences reverse racism. She stated that people speak to her in a different way and are mean to her because of her light complexion and White haircut. She is a helicopter pilot and because of this she had to cut her long, curly hair and wear a White hairstyle. She added that when her hair was curly and messy, she would get compliments. She expressed the belief that

the issue is [parents] should teach confidence and encourage their children to accept who they are and be happy. She asserted that it comes down to people being kind to each other. She stated she is happy with herself and everyone [in the discussion]. She thanked the committee for its hard work against "any kind of racism." She stressed that people need to unite, love, and take care of each other, otherwise humans will not be moving forward in the world. She stated that she does not support the bill because legislation does not need to be about hair products or sending pictures of hairstyles, because this will not make a difference.

[9:20:10 AM](#)

DAVID NEES, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 312. He shared that he has been an educator for over 30 years and was a member of the 2014 House Taskforce on Sustainable Education. He argued that the committee is about education, and the bill, even though it is noble, does not serve any educational purpose. He stated that the failure rate of Black males in the Anchorage School District is the highest of any school district in the state. He said, "I don't see how allowing them to wear afros is going to increase that." He expressed concern that the bill would not allow exemptions for occupations where long hair would be dangerous, citing this as the reason firefighters and policemen have short hair. He argued that the legislation would not increase educational output but promote tribalism. He stated the opinion that the legislation is looking for a problem. He maintained that the problem in front of the committee is the failure of education for minority children in Alaska, concluding that this bill does nothing to resolve that problem.

[9:22:11 AM](#)

ROSALYN CAROL WYCHE, representing self, testified in support of HB 312. She stated that she is the mother of a previous testifier. She shared that she has been a hairdresser since 1982 in Alaska and a third-generation salon owner. She stated that she has seen many different ethnic people in her shop and many White people with adopted Black children who do not understand Black hair. She stated that the difference is, while White people have to clean the oil out of their hair, Black people need to add oil. She expressed the opinion that the bill is necessary, as people are still being told they must change their hair to keep their job. She related the story that her granddaughter was recently told at school that she could not

wear a scarf on her head because it was not affiliated with religion. She stated that hairstyles are part of African-American culture.

MS. WYCHE offered her understanding of the frightening aspect of appearance. She stated that she would be frightened if a White male that looked like "a caveman" approached her. She stated that if hair is maintained and presentable there should be no problem. She stated she has always told her girls they are beautiful, but they still had negative encounters at school. She shared that she considers herself to be a strong Black woman, but she has a daughter, who was self-conscious at school. She acknowledged that not all people are strong. She stated that, as a strong Black woman, she reinforced her daughter's identity as precious and beautiful. She said that, through history, Black people have been stripped of their culture and their traditions. She explained that Black people only have the traditions taught in America, so it should not be a bad thing for them to express a little culture through hairstyles.

[9:30:00 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY, after ascertaining there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 312.

[9:30:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that HB 312 was held over.

SB 36-U OF A REGENTS REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

[9:30:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the final order of business would be CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 36(EDC), "An Act relating to reporting requirements of the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska."

[9:30:52 AM](#)

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented CSSB 36(EDC). He stated that in 2019 the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) lost accreditation in its education program. He stated that the "embarrassing situation" resulted from a lack of communication "between the university, various arms of the university, the department, the president and all involved." He explained that the proposed bill would

specify that the University of Alaska (UA) include accreditation plans in its biannual report to the legislature. He stated that the legislation would align with the existing requirement that the university administration report components to the UA Board of Regents, drawing attention to any program that may be compromised. He offered that the bill would not be intended as punitive and assured everything at the university is functioning properly. He offered his respect to the UA's current administration and expressed confidence that the legislation is a priority of the president and the UA Board of Regents. He asserted that the goal would be preemptive by keeping the legislature informed on accreditations and avoid the communication errors that occurred in the past.

SENATOR STEVENS stated that after the education accreditation at UAA was lost, UA brought in faculty from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) to provide the needed degrees. He added that Alaska has a great need for teachers, and it is a "shame" the biggest campus in Alaska does not have accreditation for an education program. He acknowledged that the accreditation process is complicated. He stated that the Northwest Commission for Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) offers accreditation to universities in the western part of the country. He outlined the process in that an accreditation team, made up of professors, department chairs, presidents, and deans, would be sent to a campus to review programs and make recommendations. The university would then be given time to make any changes, and the team would return to check progress. He stated that the process is long and involved but achieves high quality programs. He stated that when the education program lost its accreditation, the president of UA was blindsided, which exemplifies that there was a lack of communication. He expressed hope that the proposed legislation would make sure this type of mistake does not reoccur.

[9:34:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK offered his understanding that, despite the loss of accreditation, no one lost his/her job at the university. He deduced that if there were no jobs lost over this issue, there is zero accountability. He stated concern about [the lack of] accountability and expressed that [without any] accountability, it would be difficult for him to support the proposed legislation.

SENATOR STEVENS stated that the bill would improve accountability, as it requires the university to report to the

legislature. He stated that it is not up to him to report the details on the loss of accreditation, and who was at fault, but that question should be asked of the university.

[9:36:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX stated that the situation needs to be addressed. He expressed the opinion that no one at the university would sabotage the accreditation process, insisting there has to be standards. He questioned whether the proposed legislation would provide guidelines or requirements that the university relay meaningful information [to the legislature]. He agreed with Representative Cronk that there needs to be accountability.

SENATOR STEVENS responded that it was "disastrous" to lose the accreditation, and he is not aware of this ever occurring in another university. He stated that the NWCCU's accreditation guidelines are very clear, aligning with the goal to provide the best possible education to students. He stated that the bill would not change the process but directs the university to follow the advice of the accrediting organization. He stated that the bill would not need to be more prescriptive, as this part comes from the accrediting organization.

[9:40:20 AM](#)

PAUL LAYER, PhD, Vice President, Academics, Students, and Research, University of Alaska System, answered questions on CSSB 36(EDC). He indicated that there are different types of accreditations. Institutional accreditation indorses the entire institution and the Board of Regents, and the U.S. Department of Education sanctions this type of accreditation. He stated that NWCCU has given each of the three universities within the UA system institutional accreditation. In example, he stated that UAA went through a midcycle review last fall and received high marks in all areas, with no recommendations, but several accommodations. He stated that UA has had strong evaluations from NWCCU for as long as the university has existed, and the university is proud of its record with NWCCU from an institutional standpoint. He continued that, in addition to the institutional accreditation, the UA system has over 100 individual programs that hold specialized accreditations. Different organizations offer specialized accreditation for each program, such as engineering, nursing, and education. Each of these accrediting organizations has its own set of standards. He stated that it was one of these specialized accreditors that

did not [renew UAA's education program in 2019]. He stated that, in reviewing records, he found that UA has never before had any issue with specialized accreditation. He stated that accreditations are valuable to assure students and employers that UA has quality programs. He added that in the NWCCU's review there were no questions about the quality of the graduates from UAA's education program. He explained that the denial of accreditation had to do with how the program was "using input, feedback, improving the program, tracking the students, et cetera." He reiterated that graduates from that program have continued to receive high marks from school districts and their employers. He stated that the 2019 denial of accreditation was an "unfortunate event," and none of those interim leaders remain at the university. He expressed the belief that the quality of the programs now reflects the new leadership.

[9:43:27 AM](#)

DR. LAYER stated that the programs that were not renewed for accreditation are called initial licensure programs. Since that time, the State Board of Education and Early Development has given approval to reestablish the initial licensure program in early education and admit students to the program while accreditation is being pursued. He said, "It is sort of a chicken and egg thing: you have to have students to get accreditation, but we have to have our graduates be licensed in the state of Alaska." He stated that, as Senator Stevens mentioned, UAF and UAS are providing education programs in the Anchorage area, so the needs of students seeking teaching degrees are being met. He stated that last fall the UA Board of Regents approved modifications to its accreditation policy to incorporate some of the reporting language from AS 14.40.190. The proposed legislation would reflect this language while representing board requirements. He stated that the UA Board of Regents has now formalized reporting, making it a requirement that each chancellor inform the president and the board if there are concerns, even if the concerns are emerging and early in the status of accreditation. He emphasized that lessons learned from the 2019 incident have been taken seriously, and the university has identified responsibility and established clear reporting policies. He stated that UA provides an annual report on accreditation to the UA Board of Regents, and the proposed legislation would incorporate this reporting. He stated that the UA Board of Regents is ultimately responsible for the university and takes that responsibility seriously, especially in the realm of accreditation, as the Alaska State Constitution

has provided that the UA Board of Regents is the governing body of UA, and accreditation is a key part of its responsibility.

[9:46:34 AM](#)

DR. LAYER, in response to Co-Chair Drummond, stated that when the UAA's School of Education lost its accreditation, the dean, the provost, and the chancellor were all interim. He stated that those individuals are no longer with the university. He stated that UAA hired a new chancellor in the middle of the accreditation crisis, and the new chancellor tried to alleviate concerns, but the decision had been made.

DR. LAYER, in response to Representative Prax, stated that the guidelines for certification and accreditation are very explicit and easy to follow. He stated that when UAA was undergoing the review with the education accrediting organization, UAF was also going through the same process with the same organization. He stated that accreditation is a major undertaking, and UAF was able to move through the process with no problem. He added that UAS also underwent the same review with the same organization the following year. He stated that each university approaches the process differently, and some of the other schools of education at UAA came through the process with no problem. He pointed out that UAA lost its accreditation for the initial licensure programs, but last year gained the accreditations of specialized degree programs for returning graduates within the School of Education. He stated that UAA is trying to reestablish the initial licensure programs through the accreditation process.

DR. LAYER, responding to a follow-up question, stated that the university reviewed the circumstances surrounding the loss of accreditation and identified the issues. He pointed out there was a failure to consult experts at the university for guidance due to "the feeling that one group could do it on their own." He stated that the "failure of communication up the chain to discuss the severity of the problem" was a factor. He stated that, because this was unprecedented, there was the idea that the university may only get a warning, but the accrediting organization chose to go in a different direction with its review. He witnessed the unprecedented process unfold and expressed that the university never wants it to happen again. In response to a follow-up question, he stated that he would be able to provide the report on the investigation to the committee.

[9:52:28 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on CSSB 36(EDC). After ascertaining that there was no one who wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[9:53:20 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that CSSB 36(EDC) was held over.

[9:53:37 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 9:53 a.m.

[9:54:11 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:54 a.m.