Virginia Becomes the Fourth State to Ban Discrimination on the Basis of Hairstyles

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On March 3, 2020, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam signed into law HB 1514, which amends the Virginia Human Rights Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of hairstyles. Specifically, the bill amends the definition of discrimination "because of race" or "on the basis of race" to include discrimination "because of or on the basis of traits historically associated with race, including hair texture, hair type, and protective hairstyles such as braids, locks and twists."

In enacting this legislation, Virginia has become the fourth state in the nation to prohibit discrimination on the basis of hairstyles. In 2019, California, New York and New Jersey enacted their own versions of the law. Additionally, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Montgomery County, Maryland, have implemented local versions of the law.

Employers in Virginia subject to the Virginia Human Rights Act, which applies to employers with more than five but less than 15 employees, should review their current appearance and grooming policies to ensure compliance with the new law.

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