



Messages from the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

Below are two messages from the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) pertaining to the passage of the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act and to the request for input from the public on guidance on the use of emotional support animals (ESA) in education, employment, housing, and public accommodations.

CROWN Act

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Act (PHRA) prohibits discrimination in Pennsylvania based on race, color, familial status, religious creed, ancestry, age, sex, national origin, disability, the use, handling, or training of support or guide animals for disability, or retaliation. The PHRA applies to discrimination in employment, housing, commercial property, education, and public accommodations.

On November 25th, 2025, Governor Shapiro signed [Act 54 of 2025](#), known as the CROWN Act, into law. The act amended the PHRA to clarify that discrimination based on race includes traits associated with the individual's race, including hair texture and protective hairstyles. Protective hairstyles include, but are not limited to, locs, braids, twists, coils, Bantu knots, afros, and extensions. The act also clarified that discrimination based on religious creed includes head coverings and hairstyles historically associated with religious creeds. The law includes exceptions for rules or policies adopted for the health or safety of an employee, adopted for nondiscriminatory reasons, tailored specifically to the position, or applied equally to individuals in applicable positions.

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission specifies that examples of discrimination under the CROWN Act include, but are not limited to:

- Firing a person because of their hairstyle.
- Creating school policies restricting how students can wear or treat their hair.
- Creating company policies requiring employees to alter their hair outside of safety codes.
- Retaliation for filing a complaint or opposing unlawful behavior.

For additional information on the CROWN Act, please see [PHRC CROWN Protections](#) or [PHRC Protecciones CROWN](#).

Request for Public Input on Emotional Support Animals

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) is in the process of developing guidance for the public regarding how it will evaluate cases involving the use of emotional support animals (ESA) in education, employment, housing, and public accommodations.

Under the PHRC's current provisions, emotional support animals are recognized primarily in the context of housing accommodations, ensuring that individuals with disabilities receive equal housing opportunities. However, these provisions do not extend to other public spaces or accommodations.

The PHRC is seeking public input regarding access to public accommodations with emotional support animals specifically. Emotional support animals are not service animals like seeing eye dogs and they are not trained to

do a particular task. Rather, individuals with certain disabilities have found the presence of these animals provide a significant emotional benefit.

Public accommodations are places open to the public, like stores, restaurants, amusement parks, schools, colleges, and universities.

The PHRC is looking to hear from individuals who use ESAs, advocacy groups, businesses, and other effected individuals and entities. The PHRC would like to hear about your experiences, concerns, and suggestions. Public comment will be accepted via an [online survey](#) from December 1 through December 31, 2025. The PHRC will accept comment from schools, postsecondary and higher education institutions, and libraries via email (aburman@pa.gov) until January 29, 2026.

After the one-month public input period concludes, the PHRC will develop draft guidance informed by the feedback received. Once the draft is finalized, it will be released for a public comment period before being reviewed and accepted by the Commission.



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