

LOCAL / REGIONAL

CROWN Act Passes Tennessee House

Measure prohibiting discrimination against natural hairstyles could soon move to the governor's desk for a signature

NASHVILLE—The House of Representatives on April 18, 2022 passed The CROWN Act, making Tennessee's statehouse the first in the deep South to approve legislation prohibiting discrimination against natural hairstyles.

Senate Bill 136, sponsored by Sen. Raumesh Akbari and Rep. Karen Camper, passed the House Monday on a vote of 50–25. The Senate approved the measure last May.

The CROWN Act, an acronym meaning "Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair," would prevent employers from adopting policies against natural and protective hair-

styles, such as braids, locs and twists.

Under the measure, an employee who is subjected to a violation of their right to wear their hair naturally may file a complaint to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

For decades, black hair has been unjustly policed as too "unprofessional" or "unkempt" for public spaces, such as classrooms and workplaces, says Sen. Akbari.

"This is a big day for any Tennessean who has ever been told their hair looks unprofessional," said Akbari, who parents own a haircare business in Memphis. "No one should ever have to experience discrimination because of the hair that grows out of their head.

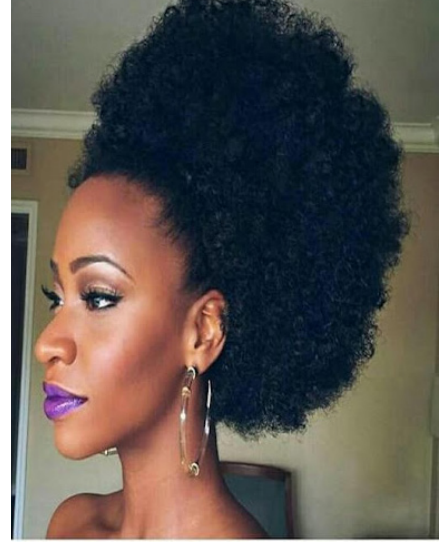
"Every Tennessean should feel free to wear their natural CROWN!" said Akbari.

In June 2019, California became the first state to outlaw racial discrimination against individuals based on their natural hairstyles. Since then, at least 12 more states have made the CROWN Act law.

If signed into law, Tennessee would be the first state in the deep South to ban discrimination against natural hair.

"Tennessee made history today in passing the CROWN Act and turning the page on decades of discrimination against natural hairstyles and textures," said Rep. Camper. "This is an important step toward freedom and respect for workers, no matter how we wear our hair."

The Tennessee Senate is expected to soon take a final technical action on the bill to match language between the House and Senate versions and then



send the bill to the governor for a signature.

Blakk Tatted, Fruit Flavored Hookah to Replace Nicotine Alternatives to Smoking

By Alison Decker

NASHVILLE, TN — Blakk Tatted, founder and CEO of Blakk Smoke, a New Orleans, Louisiana based hookah Company talk's nicotine free alternatives to smoking in an interview.

"My two close friends along with my love and passion for hookah were the ultimate masterpieces that led to turning my dream into a reality and creating Blakk Smoke," he said.

The funding to start Blakk Smoke came from Tatted's social media earnings as an influencer for promotion companies. He saved every dollar of his earnings and put it towards forming his company, he said.

The website features their best-selling hookah pens and hookahs with a variety of flavors and hookah accessories. The hookah pen flavors are: blueberry mint, sweet bubble gum, tropical fruit, cotton candy, green apple, skittles, strawberry lemonade, watermelon, peach mango and pineapple. The hookah flavors for the handheld hookah in-

clude: green apple, exotic grape, orange mint, watermelon mint, strawberry lemonade, blueberry mint, mango, mint, strawberry, peach, watermelon, tropical, banana, plum and pineapple fruit varieties.

The hookah flavors are all fruit-based and tobacco-free, eliminating the light-headedness that comes with smoking regular hookah. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Tobacco use is a major contributor to the three leading causes of death among African Americans—heart disease, cancer, and stroke." The CDC also noted, "More than 63.4% report attempting to quit but not being able to stick with it. Hookah offers the same smoking pattern but without the negative effects of nicotine with increasing chances of cancer and heart disease."

Tatted's hope for the company in the future is to see Blakk Smoke being operated by his sons, Cardy'ae and Ca'hirey. He attributes his work inspiration to building an empire for his chil-

dren, future grandchildren and providing generational wealth. His website, blakksmoke.com, is updated frequently with new flavors and hookah accessories and products.

All of Blakk Smoke's products are shipped from the warehouse and individually packaged and labeled, he said. The business operates with four in-store employees and additional warehouse workers for packaging. Blakk Smoke is looking to expand the team as they grow.

"We at Blakk Smoke believe that our customers are our top priority and truly the reason for all of our success. Blakk Smoke is nothing without its customers," Tatted said.

Tennessee's current age restriction on tobacco, vaping, and smoking products was raised to 21+ in accordance with Public Chapter No. 732 effective since January 1, 2021. Blakk Smoke's products are nicotine-free and fruit based so ages 18 and up can purchase and smoke this hookah.



Blakk Tatted

Smoking fruit-based hookah can be a healthy alternative to individuals addicted to nicotine as well as adults trying to quit smoking. As the technology of smoking evolves, some states are taking steps to mitigate the use of tobacco products by increasing age limits, including Louisiana and Tennessee.

Debate and Forensics Team Earns HBCU No. 1 Ranking

By Emmanuel Freeman

NASHVILLE, TN (TSU News Service) — The Tennessee State University Debate and Forensics Team is number 1 among HBCUs in the nation.

At the recent 5th Annual HBCU National Speech and Debate Competition at Prairie View A&M University, TSU walked away with 10 national titles, 50 total awards and the overall tournament championship, making them the top HBCU in the country for the third consecutive year.

"I started three years ago not winning at any tournament and now to being a three-time national champion is phenomenal," said team captain Maya McClary, a senior mass communications major from Orlando, Florida. "My experience on the team has been life changing. Forensics has taught me to use my speech as an outlet to express myself. I would not change anything or anyone on this team."

Ashlynn Freeman, a sophomore and first-year member of the team, said this championship is special because it gives her a voice she didn't have before.

"As a young African American woman, I feel constantly that I have no voice in the world because I am shown not to be heard," said Freeman, an agricultural science major from Kansas City, Kansas. "With the platform that speech and debate give me, I'm being heard."

This year, the tournament returned to in-person, after going virtual the last two years due to the pandemic. Other institutions participating in the tournament April 1-3 included Howard University, Texas Southern University and North Carolina A&T.

Prof. Sean Allen, director of foren-



TSU's Debate and Forensics Team members seated l-r: Aliyah Holmes, Marshaun Adams, Akyra McDougal, Sanae Chestnut, Ashlynn Freeman, Mark Twyman, Deja Thomas, Ayana Nichole, Chase Garrett and Maya McClary; Standing l-r: Mariah Brown, De'Traelyn Hubbard, Elizabeth Ward, Dwight DeBerry and DezNeshia Gasper

sics in the TSU Department of Communications, is the coach of the TSU debate team. He attributes the success of the group to the "hard work" of the students and to the support of the communications department.

"This win was a group effort," said Allen, who has been with the program at the university for the last six years. "This couldn't have been achieved without the support from the communications department and university

competitions like the Robert N Murrell Oratorical Competition, where I recruit top talent."

Dr. Jacqueline W. Mitchell, professor and chair of the Oratorical competition, congratulated the team for their championship, and thanked Prof. Allen for his commitment.

"The TSU Forensics Team, #1 nationally ranked, consistently outranks competing HBCUs year after year under the coaching of Professor Sean Al-

len," said Mitchell, who also chairs the Robert N. Murrell Oratorical Contest. "Because of this national reputation which we've held for several years, we attract annually the top high school debaters across the nation to our freshman class. They all want to be a part of a top-seeded winning team, which TSU provides at the highest level."

Ukraine: from front

tantship, opening doors to international students impacted by the crisis in Ukraine.

The program offers two selected students paid tuition, free room and board and a \$600 monthly stipend while they pursue a master's degree in public administration, business administration, computer science or engineering management at UTC from August 2022 through May 2024.

The students' undergraduate degrees should be in majors similar to the master's degree concentration.

Preference will be given to students who are Ukrainian citizens living in or who once lived in the affected areas.

Battered Ukrainian university campuses are among the rubble and devastation seen nightly on TV news-casts. The UTC program will equip the students for the vast reconstruc-

tion necessary in their devastated home country, Suzuki said.

"I think it's going to really open doors for the participants after the war. When they decide to go back home to help rebuild the country, what they learn from this master's program and the experience they gain at UTC will enable them to make an impact in the community redevelopment. At the same time, they will be building bridges between Chattanooga, Ukraine and beyond."

Recognizing the need for opportunities and helping create them for the good of society is why universities exist, Suzuki added.

"This is about adding to the body of human knowledge and, through it, new solutions or improvements to existing solutions," he said. "I'm excited about what student recipients of this assistantship will be able to add to their fields of research and about what I believe they will add to UTC. Moreover, UTC students and our campus community will build authentic learn-

ing and applicable processes by hosting these Ukrainian students."

Advocacy for the new program also came from an engaged, impassioned UTC Student Government Association.

"Members of the Student Government Association authored and passed a resolution calling for this kind of University support for students affected by the war in Ukraine," Suzuki said. "They used their voices in an inspiring manner, and they made an impact. I am so glad to see these students recognize the opportunity they have to use their platform as campus leaders to bring awareness and help bring action to address such important concerns.

"Also, I believe that making a way for the exceptionally well-qualified students who will be selected for this opportunity to reach their full potential as student-scholars is the right thing to do, and it makes me very proud to be part of UTC."

Application deadline for the assistantship is May 14.

For consideration, applicants must have sufficient English language proficiency to successfully complete the program's academic requirements. Additional requirements are available at utc.edu/global.

Requirements:
Proof of English proficiency (Minimum requirement TOEFL IBP=79. IELTS=6.0. Duolingo=100)

Most recent transcript or proof of completion of bachelor's (undergraduate) degree

Copy of passport ID page
Copy of I-20 or DS2019 (If you are currently in the U.S. with an F1 or J1 student visa)

Essay: What makes you really happy? (Maximum 800 words)

Video: Tell us about yourself and explain how your current situation was caused or impacted by the war in Ukraine; how you and your family have been affected. Describe your career goals.