

LOCAL / REGIONAL

Laws Banning Employers From Discriminating Against Natural Hair, Dozens of Others, Take Effect July 1



Effective July 1, Tennessee's CROWN (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair) Act prevents employers from discriminating against natural hair or protective hairstyles like braids, locs and twists.

By Camm Ashford

Dozens of new laws passed in the last session of the Tennessee General Assembly took effect on July 1.

One such law, the "CROWN" Act, or HB 204, bans employers from discriminating against natural hair or protective hairstyles like braids, locs, twist or bantu knots--especially those which express "characteristics associated with a certain race." State Rep. Karen Camper and state Sen. Raumes Akbari, both Democrats from Memphis, sponsored the bill.

CROWN is an acronym for Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair. The CROWN Act is now law in 17 states. California was the first state to pass legislation outlawing racial discrimination against people based on their natural hairstyles. As of July 1, Tennessee is the first state in the Mid-South to make the CROWN Act law.

"I think people have a right to be proud of their hair and who they are, and now this bill is going to protect them so that they can't be fired because of it," Sen. Akbari said.

The CROWN Act does not apply to public safety employees if a protective style would prevent them from performing essential parts of their job.

The act will allow employees who face discrimination to file a complaint to the federal government.

Under HB 1459, those arrested on accusations of domestic abuse must stay away from the victim's residence for at least 24 hours. State Rep. Yusuf Hakeem, D-Chattanooga, and state Sen. Jeff Yarbrow, D-Nashville, sponsored this law.

To impose stricter penalties on criminals who engage in drive-by shootings, another law requires that a person convicted of aggravated assault that involved the use or display of a deadly weapon be punished one classification higher than otherwise provided by law if the violation was committed by discharging a firearm from within a motor vehicle. Rep.

John Gillespie, R-Memphis, and Sen. Paul Rose, R-Tipton, sponsored HB 209 to "crack down on drive-by shootings."

Truth in Sentencing, or HB 2656, will require those convicted of violent crimes, including aggravated assault, murder, carjacking, aggravated burglary and kidnapping, to serve their entire sentence without a chance of reduced time. State House Speaker Cameron Sexton, R-Crossville, and Lt. Gov. Randy McNally, R-Oak Ridge, sponsored the bill.

"Joker's Law," or HB 1646, will impose felony punishment for killing or harming a service animal without the owner's consent. The bill's namesake is K-9 Joker, who was shot in 2021 while pursuing burglary suspects in Cleveland. Rep. Mark Hall, R-Cleveland, and Sen. Mike Bell, R-Riceville, sponsored the law.

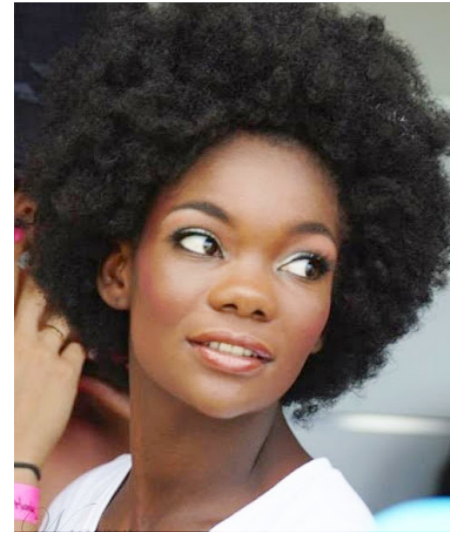
Homemade food will be exempt from regulation under the "Tennessee Food Freedom Act," or HB 813. Producing or selling homemade food will be free of state regulations, unless officials are investigating food-borne sickness. State Rep. Justin Lafferty, R-Knoxville, and state Sen. Frank Niceley, R-Strawberry Plains, sponsored the measure.

Overall, there's little controversy about the CROWN Act, or lesser known new laws such as the one that requires utility companies to provide the estimates of connection fees to potential customers, or one that allows defendants for whom bail has been set to pay with a debit card instead of cash.

Other laws--like the one that requires school librarians to classify material as obscene even if it has educational value; the one banning transgender athletes from competing in women's sports at public colleges and universities, as well as private institutions that compete against them; and the law that criminalizes camping on public property--have made headlines



Homeless rights activists camped on downtown Nashville streets to protest a new law that criminalizes camping on public property. (Photo: John Partipilo)



and stirred outcry as they progressed through legislatures this year.

Officials will consider camping on public property a felony, and camping along a highway, on-ramp or off-ramp a misdemeanor under HB 0978. Sponsors Sen. Paul Bailey, R-Sparta, and Rep. Ryan Williams, R-Cookeville, defended the bill as a tool local law enforcement could use to address homelessness.

Advocates for Tennessee's homeless population contend the law which defines camping as erecting tents or tarps under bridges or overpasses and alongside state highways, as targeting houseless Tennesseans.

"Tennessee is poised to double down on using the criminal legal sys-

tem to punish the poor," the Vera Institute of Justice said in a statement. "The additional threat of a felony charge for public camping is likely to push unhoused Tennesseans into deeper desperation."

Gov. Bill Lee said he didn't approve of the new law and didn't sign it, saying he wants to look for alternatives to it, but let it become law without his signature.

To protest the new law, last week several hundred people in Nashville marched through the streets of downtown before setting up tents and sleeping on benches overnight to test it.

Metro Nashville Police declined to make arrests.

Nash: from front

courage they embodied."

Diane Judith Nash, what else don't we know?

Although not as prominent as other leaders in the American movement for civil rights, Nash's role as a leader has few parallels. Her campaigns were among the most successful of the era and includes organizing the first successful civil rights campaign to integrate lunch counters in Nashville and the Freedom Riders to desegregated interstate travel.

"It was clear to me that if we allowed the Freedom Rides to stop at that point, just after so much violence had been inflicted, the message would have been that all you have to do to stop a nonviolent campaign is inflict massive violence," said Nash in the 2010 documentary Freedom Riders.

Originally fearful of jail, Nash was arrested dozens of times for her activities and spent 30 days in a South Carolina jail after protesting segregation in Rock Hill in 1961. In February that year, Nash served jail time in solidarity confinement with the "Rock Hill Nine," nine students imprisoned after a lunch counter sit-in. They were sentenced to pay a \$50 fine for sitting at a whites-only lunch counter.

Nash said to the judge, "We feel that if we pay these fines we would be contributing to and supporting the injustice and immoral practices that have been performed in the arrest and conviction of the defendants."

In 1962, although four months pregnant with her daughter Sherri, Nash faced a two-year prison sentence in Mississippi for "contributing to the delinquency of minors" whom she had encouraged to become Freedom Riders. Despite her pregnancy, she was ready to serve her time with the possibility of her daughter's being born in jail.

"I believe that if I go to jail now, it may help hasten that day when my child and all children will be free, not only on the day of their birth but for all their lives." She was sentenced to 10 days in jail in Jackson, Mississippi, where she spent her time there washing her only set of clothing in the sink during the day and, she recalls, "listening to 'cockroaches skitter overhead at night'".

Shocked by the 1963 church bombing in Birmingham that killed four young girls, Nash and activist James Bevel committed to raising a nonviolent army in Alabama. Their goal was the vote for every Black adult in Alabama, among other southern states that had effectively excluded Blacks

from the political system since disenfranchising them at the turn of the century.

Diane Nash is featured in the documentary film series Eyes on the Prize (1987) and the 2000 series A Force More Powerful about the history of nonviolent conflict and featured in the PBS American Experience documentary on the Freedom Riders. Nash is credited for her work in David Halberstam's book about the Nashville Student Movement, The Children, as well as Lisa Mullins' Diane Nash: The Fire of the Civil Rights Movement.

In addition, she has received the Distinguished American Award from the John F. Kennedy Library and Foundation (2003), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diane_Nash - cite note-JFK Award-29 and the LBJ Award for Leadership in Civil Rights from the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum (2004).

In 2013, Nash expressed her support for Barack Obama, while also sharing her misgivings about his continuing involvements in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While encouraged by the positive implications associated with electing the first Black president of the United States, Nash still believes that the true changes in American society will come from its citizens, not government officials.

Although she attended the Selma 50th anniversary celebrations in March 2015, Nash was noticeably absent from the restaging of the 1965 Selma march. When asked about her refusal to participate in the historic event, Nash cited the attendance of former president George W. Bush. Nash, who has dedicated her life to pursuits of peace and nonviolence, declared that Bush "stands for just the opposite. For violence and war and stolen elections, and his administration had people tortured."

Today Diane Nash remains humble and reflective.

"It took many thousands of people to make the changes that we made, people whose names we'll never know. They'll never get credit for the sacrifices they've made but I remember them."

But your name, Diane Nash, is one we'll never forget.

© Terry Howard is an award-winning writer and storyteller. He is also a contributing writer with the Chattanooga News Chronicle, The American Diversity Report, The Douglas County Sentinel, Blackmarket.com, Home-town Advantage, co-founder of the "26 Tiny Paint Brushes" writers' guild, recipient of the 2019 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award and 3rd place winner of the 2022 Georgia Press Award.