

# H.478/S.290 would prevent the suspension or expulsion of students for dress code violations



Massachusetts  
**Appleseed**  
Center for Law & Justice

Sponsored by Rep. Fluker Oakley and Sen. Gomez



Despite efforts to address racial disparities in school discipline in Massachusetts, Black students remain 3 times more likely to be disciplined and 5 times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their white counterparts.

Last year, Massachusetts enacted The CROWN Act, which limited school disciplinary actions that were aimed at protective and natural hairstyles. H.478/S.290 would complement that law by banning exclusionary discipline on the basis of dress code violations.

“There will be white girls wearing really short skirts and crop tops...They get to go through the day without being apprehended or anything...Black girls with more of a body, they are being dress coded...It makes me feel uncomfortable because there are other people wearing the same thing but there's only certain people getting in trouble for it.”

– 8th grade Massachusetts student

## 2018-2019 School Year

Black female students are **3.2x**

Latinx female students are **2.6x**

American Indian female students are **2.4x**

Multiracial female students are **1.9x**

*...more likely to experience discipline than their white counterparts*

## This bill would:

- Authorize school committees to include a student dress code in the student code of conduct, but **prohibit school officials from suspending or expelling students solely on the basis of a violation of a dress code**
- Require that all school dress codes:
  - Allow students to wear clothing that is **connected to their religion or ethnicity**, including hijabs, yarmulkes, scarves, and headwraps
  - Ensure that the code is **applied with neutrality** to all students
  - Maintain gender neutrality **regardless of gender identity**
  - Have **clear, specific, and objective** definitions
  - Ensure **dress codes are not enforced through direct physical contact** with a student
  - **Not force a student to undress** in front of another person
- **NOT** prevent school officials from forbidding students from wearing clothing with a **hateful or vulgar message**

## Questions?

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