



PHOTO BY DONOVAN M. SMITH/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Amber Starks will be able to braid, loc, and twist hair in the Oregon workplace without the burdensome requirements of a cosmetology license thanks to her advocacy of a new law easing restrictions.

Hair Care Victory

Practitioners of natural hair get restrictions eased

BY DONOVAN M. SMITH
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

There are some abilities learned through the years from origins not pinpointed to a specific moment in time. For many in the African-American community, one of these generational skills is the ability to braid, loc, and twist hair.

But Oregon put burdensome regulations for practitioners of natural hair care until now, thanks to the passage of a law to ease the restrictions.

Portland resident Amber Starks owns a salon solely focused on natural hair styling in Vancouver. She led the grassroots fight to change the law after discovering she needed a cosmetology license to offer volunteer services to Oregon children in foster care.

Cosmetology licensing in Oregon is earned after 1,700 hours of coursework and training and can cost up to \$17,000 or more, not including various materials students often self-supply. Though this often results in roughly two years of schooling, students often leave without ever being taught how to properly braid, twist or dread hair.

Though initially reluctant, Starks got in contact with Oregon Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer and Sen. Jackie Dingfelder of northeast Portland in search of a resolution. To her surprise both responded; that was in November 2011.

The deadline for new bills had already passed, but between persistent phone calls and emails to both representatives she made sure the proposed legislation would be considered for 2012. It was then introduced in Salem as House Bill 3409 also known as the

Natural Hair Care Act.

After passing through the Oregon's House of Representatives in a unanimous 60-0 vote last month, the bill was adopted by the Senate on Thursday in a much less united 18-11 showing.

Oregon now stands as the 23rd state in the last 10 years to have modified their laws in regards to chemical-free hairstyling.

Urban League of Portland President Michael Alexander who worked closely with Starks to comb through the legal issues and build community support to change cosmetology law said it was important to knock down the barriers to people wanting to start a business based solely on natural hair styling.

Roslyn Graham, a licensed beautician and the African-American owner of Shape It Up salon in northeast Portland, has mixed feelings about the bill's passage.

"Our hair has its own history," Graham said.

But the flip side to easing regulations is that it could take customers away from a hair styling professional that has gone to school and got their license.

"For someone doing hair on the side, they could become competition," Graham said.

At Geneva's Shear Perfection and Beauty Salon, also in Northeast Portland, stylist Laticia Staples said the new law was a smart choice.

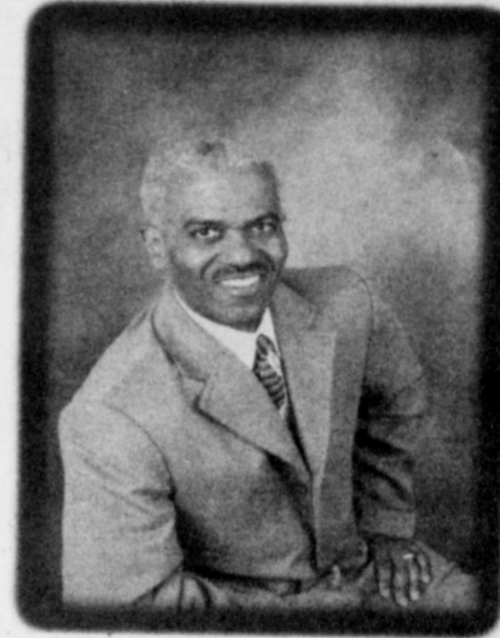
"A lot of people are going back to natural hair, wearing a lot of up-dos and braids, twists, and dreads. It will help a lot of people find employment during this recession," she said.

The bill creates a new license, under the Board of Cosmetology, that limits the scope of practice to just natural hair care and requires proof of knowledge of health and safety standards.

The law technically still awaits Gov. John Kitzhaber signature, but a veto is not expected.

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