

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2023

The Honorable Robert M. Califf
Commissioner
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20993

Dear Commissioner Califf:

We write to request the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) conduct a thorough and transparent investigation to determine whether publicly available chemical hair straightening products contain carcinogens that lead to a higher risk of uterine cancer. Black women use these products at a higher rate than others and could be disproportionately impacted. In order to protect public health, we urge the FDA to reevaluate the safety of these products.

Chemical hair straighteners and relaxers are primarily marketed to Black women to alter the appearance of hair. These products, often in the form of lotions and creams, break down the protein structure of curly hair to permanently straighten it. As a result of anti-Black hair sentiment, Black women have been unfairly subjected to scrutiny and forced to navigate the extreme politicization of hair.¹ Hence, generations of Black women have adapted by straightening hair in an attempt to achieve social and economic advancement. Manufacturers of chemical straighteners have gained enormous profits,² but recent findings unveil potentially significant negative health consequences associated with these products.

The National Institutes of Health recently published research on the link between chemical hair straightening products and a person's risk of uterine cancer.³ The 2022 study found that frequent chemical hair straightening doubled the risk of developing uterine cancer among women, compared with those who did not use the products. Another study showed that harmful chemicals were found in "about 50 percent of products advertised to Black women," as opposed to just seven percent in those marketed to others.⁴ The increased risk disproportionately impacts Black women and contributes to national racial health disparities. The FDA has a mandate to review the latest research and reevaluate the safety of these products.

We urge the FDA to investigate the potential health threat posed by chemical hair straightening products. Consumers need to be reassured that the cosmetic products they use do not threaten their health. It is critical that the agency act quickly to address these legitimate concerns.

Thank you for your attention. Please do not hesitate to contact our offices with any questions.

¹ *Natural Hair Discrimination*, Legal Defense Fund, <https://www.naacpldf.org/natural-hair-discrimination/>

² *Hair Straightener Market*, Market Data Forecast, (January 2022), <https://www.marketdataforecast.com/market-reports/hair-straightener-market>

³ *Hair Straightening Chemicals Associated with Higher Uterine Cancer Risk*, National Institute of Environmental Health Science (Oct.17, 2022), <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/news/newsroom/releases/2022/october17/index.cfm>

⁴ *Some Black hair products may harm users' health*, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, (2020), <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/some-black-hair-products-may-harm-users-health/>

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Ayanna S. Pressley in blue ink.

Ayanna Pressley

Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Shontel Brown in blue ink.

Shontel Brown

Member of Congress