

Air Force to allow longer braids, ponytails, bangs for women

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ARLINGTON, Va. (AFNS) --

As an outcome of the 101st Air Force uniform board, Air Force women will be able to wear their hair in up to two braids or a single ponytail with bulk not exceeding the width of the head and length not extending below a horizontal line running between the top of each sleeve inseam at the under arm through the shoulder blades. In addition, women's bangs may now touch their eyebrows, but not cover their eyes.

These new changes will be effective upon publication of the new standards in Air Force Instruction 36-2903 in February.

“As I outlined in Action Order A: Airmen, this decision is a commitment to supporting the Airmen We Need and sustaining the culture and environment of excellence that will continue to make the Air Force an attractive career choice for Airmen and families,” said Air Force Chief of Staff [Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.](#) “I’m thankful for the feedback and research conducted from a number of women leaders, the Women’s Initiative Team, the Air Force uniform board, and our joint teammates.”

The Air Force uniform board convened virtually in November 2020 to discuss ideas sourced from Airmen across the Air Force who participated in a dress and appearance crowdsourcing campaign. Participants on the board included 19 diverse Airmen of various ranks from across the major commands and headquarters directorates.

The board reviewed all ideas including a recommendation from the Air Force’s Women’s Initiative Team. Thousands of women across the Air Force provided feedback to the Women’s Initiative Team, stating constraints to hair grooming standards resulted in damage to hair, migraines and in some cases, hair loss. The detailed work done by the Women’s Initiative Team to research and support the recommendation was greatly appreciated by the uniform board.

“In addition to the health concerns we have for our Airmen, not all women have the same hair type, and our hair standards should reflect our diverse force,” said [Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne S. Bass](#). “I am pleased we could make this important change for our women service members.”

In addition to addressing issues associated with personal health and hair loss, adjusting female hair standards supports ongoing efforts to address diversity and inclusion in the ranks. Earlier this year and in her role leading the Defense Department’s Diversity Board, then-Secretary of the Air Force [Barbara M. Barrett](#) played a prominent role in supporting these types of adjustments to ensure a more inclusive culture in the services.

The Air Force chief of staff approved the policy after considering feedback from the force, the uniform board recommendation, and the professional image and standards of the Air Force and U.S. military.

“We remain committed to removing barriers to service,” said [Lt. Gen. Brian Kelly](#), Air Force deputy chief of staff for manpower, personnel and services. “In an all-volunteer force, we want fully qualified volunteers

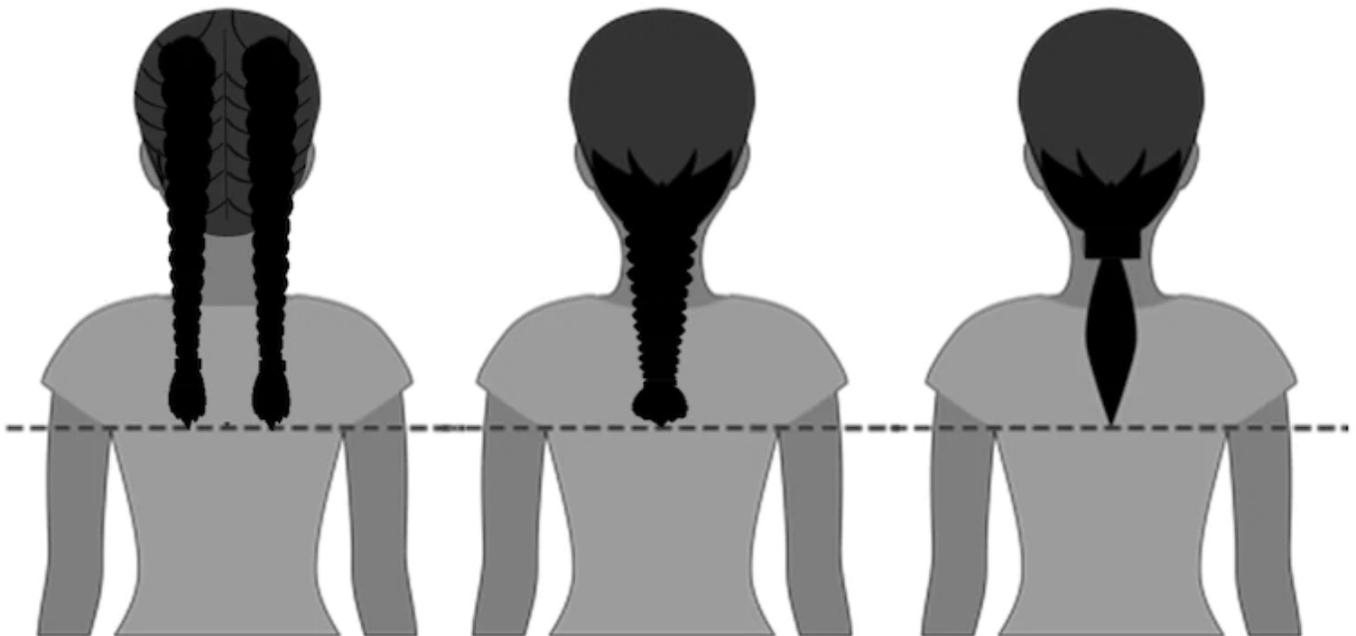
who are representative of the nation to see us as a great opportunity to maximize their talent and serve.”

Members must adhere to current occupational safety, fire and health guidance, and mishap prevention procedures emphasizing when and how to mitigate the potential for injury from hair of varying lengths around machinery, equipment, power transmission apparatus or moving parts. Airmen are encouraged to reach out to their safety office for assistance in analyzing any potential hazards, as applicable.

Another idea considered by the board related to beard wear for men. Unlike with women’s hair standards, there are no known health or hair loss issues associated with current male grooming standard compliance. As such, the Air Force plans to continue under the current male grooming standards without adjustments. Beards are currently permitted in conjunction with medical exceptions such as shaving waivers or for approved religious accommodations.

At this time, Guardians will adhere to the female grooming standards of the Air Force. Eventually, the U.S. Space Force will develop its own policy.

Numerous other ideas from the board are still under consideration for implementation and will be released in the future. For more information, consult [AFI 36-2903 Dress and Appearance](#).



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arm through the shoulder blades. In addition, women's bangs may now touch their eyebrows, but not cover their eyes. (Courtesy graphic)

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