



THE COUNCIL OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

June 4, 2007

Chancellor Joel I. Klein  
New York City Department of Education  
52 Chambers Street  
New York NY 10007

**Re: Protecting Sikh Children from Bias-Based Harassment in New York City Schools**

Dear Chancellor Klein:

As you are aware, on May 25, 2007, a Sikh high school student at Newtown High School in Elmhurst, Queens was attacked in what law enforcement has deemed a hate crime. Sadly, the student's long, uncut hair – a mandatory article of the Sikh faith – was forcibly cut by the alleged perpetrator.

We know that you share our common belief that City schools should be a place where our differences are celebrated, not a point of attack among our children. We write to you to affirm this belief, but to also point out that Sikh students are especially vulnerable to bias and persecution because their articles of faith stand out.

Today the Sikh Coalition released preliminary results from an ongoing survey of Sikh students in the City's public schools. Of the students surveyed, 58.4% reported being harassed or physically attacked because of their actual or perceived national origin or religion. In addition, a troubling 62.2% of Sikh boys who maintain all their articles of faith reported being harassed in schools because of their actual or perceived national origin or religion.

Though the bias and harassment Sikh school children face is significant, it is often the result of ignorance that can be combated with education. We request that the Department of Education take immediate measures to ensure that all students in the public schools, including Sikh students, are safe and free from harassment or bias. Specifically, we request you to do the following: 1) Meet with affected community groups to devise a plan of action to promote appreciation of diversity in the schools; and, 2) Incorporate educational information on Sikhs and South Asians into the school curriculum as a means of promoting tolerance.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Robert Jackson  
Chairperson, Education Committee

John C. Liu

Hiram Monserrate

Letitia James

David I. Weprin

Gale A. Brewer

G. Oliver Koppell

Lewis A. Fidler

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