Making Our Voices Heard:
A Civil Rights Agenda for New York City’s Sikhs
In December 2006, the Sikh Coalition, with the help of several dedicated volunteers, began conducting the first ever civil rights survey of New York City’s Sikhs. The survey intended to gather information on Sikhs’ experiences with incidents of bias, employment discrimination, language access and other issues that hinder full integration into New York’s civic and political life.

This report represents the results obtained from the data we collected from 1,021 Sikhs who live in New York City’s five boroughs. The data presented in this report identifies significant gaps between the promise of the law and the Sikh community’s reality on the ground.

Armed with this information, New York City’s Sikhs are now releasing our own Civil Rights Agenda. The Agenda, included in this report, puts forth policy recommendations to close the gap between what the law mandates and what our community’s experience has been. In the coming months and years, the Sikh Coalition will spearhead advocacy efforts to further our recommendations.

Copies of this report are available by contacting Neha Singh, The Sikh Coalition’s Advocacy Director, at neha@sikhcoalition.org.
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Survey Methodology

A total of 1,021 individuals who identify themselves as being members of the Sikh faith were surveyed for this project. The survey project ran continuously from December 2006 to November 2007, and respondents were limited to residents of the five boroughs of New York City. Survey efforts were concentrated in Queens because it is home to the majority of New York City’s Sikh population.

According to 2007 figures released by the New York City Department of City Planning, the total population of New York City is 8,250,567. While neither the United States Census nor the Department of City Planning collects data on religion, the Sikh population of New York City is estimated to be around 50,000, based on the membership roles of area gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship).

The Sikh Coalition’s survey questionnaire was provided in either English or Punjabi, the native language of many Sikh adults. Separate surveys were provided for children 18 and under. Questions on the children’s survey primarily concerned school bullying and harassment. Questions on the adult survey broadly covered the following issues, as they pertain to the respondents’ Sikh identity:

* Hate Crimes or Harassment
* School Bullying and Discrimination
* Employment Discrimination and Workplace Harassment
* Language Access
* Public Accommodation
* Health Insurance
* Relationship with Law Enforcement

Sikh Coalition staff and volunteers distributed the surveys during designated “survey days” in area gurdwaras and online. In total, the Sikh Coalition held 22 survey days in gurdwaras during the course of the project, 18 of which were in Queens-based gurdwaras. No Bronx gurdwaras could be identified, therefore no survey days were held in that borough. Nevertheless, Sikh Bronx residents were encouraged

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to respond to the survey online or, if present, in other area gurdwaras.

Of the total 1,021 responses that were received, 103 were submitted online and 900 were submitted during survey days. An additional 18 responses were collected at a Sikh Student Association meeting at New York University and through individual, in-person outreach.

Of the 1,021 respondents, 57% were adults and 43% were children 18 years old or less, as of the time they completed the survey. One of every three respondents was female, at both the adult and child levels. The average age of our respondent pool was 27.4 years – 38.5 years old for adults and 13.1 years old for children.

Some respondents inadvertently or purposely skipped certain questions. Unless otherwise stated, the figures provided in this report were calculated from the answers given or from the total number of Sikhs who responded to the survey. In addition, due to rounding, the total of individual percentages may not always sum to 100%. Survey data and questionnaires are available upon request.

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2 Of the 408 respondents to the children’s survey, three were 19 years old, two were 20 years old, and one was 21 years old. However, these six respondents answered questions about their high school experiences, which occurred within the last four years. For that reason, throughout this report, these six respondents have been counted as children.
Who are Sikhs?

Sikhs are an independent religion that is nearly 500 years old, and has its roots in Punjab, a region in South Asia. The Sikh faith has 26 million adherents worldwide, making it the world’s fifth largest religion. Sikhs have been in the United States for over 100 years, but remain a small minority. There are only about 50,000 Sikhs in New York City. Still, Sikhs’ active commitment to their communities and their city is evident in this snapshot of New York City’s Sikhs.

- Nearly 47% of Sikh adults in New York City are American citizens.
- Sikhs take their civic commitment seriously. 86% of Sikh adults who are eligible are registered to vote, while the national average for all eligible voters is 69.5%.
- On average, Sikhs in New York City have lived in the United States for 14 years.
- More than 40% of Sikh adults in New York City speak English as their primary language.
- One third of New York City’s Sikh adults are self-employed. 15% work in construction, and 7% drive cabs or limousines in New York City.
- In addition to being predominantly South Asian, nine out of ten Sikhs we surveyed carry some outward manifestation of their faith.

Sikhs’ visible identity, a manifestation of their inner commitment to their faith, makes Sikhs stand out. According to the requirements of the Sikh faith, many Sikhs do not cut their hair or shave their beards. Consequently, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York City, Sikhs have been repeatedly misidentified as members of the Taliban or Osama bin Laden’s terrorist network.

In North America, the majority of those who wear turbans are Sikhs. As a result, recurring media images of alleged terrorists and negative portrayals of men in turbans have created an environment in which Sikhs are regularly singled out for harassment, verbal abuse and mistreatment by both private and, at times, public actors.

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3 The figures in this section extrapolate the results of our survey to the population of New York City Sikhs.
5 If a respondent skipped the question pertaining to which articles of faith they keep, we have not assumed that to indicate that the person either keeps or does not keep any article of faith. The five Sikh articles of faith are (1) Kes – unshorn hair; (2) Kara – steel bracelet; (3) Kanga – small comb; (4) Kirpan – a religious sword; and (5) Kacherra – special long underwear. See also, Glossary, pg. 20 herein.
Summary of Survey Results

Harassment

41% of New York City’s Sikhs (children and adults) report being called derogatory names such as “Bin Laden” or “terrorists” by their fellow New Yorkers.

Bias in Schools

Half of the City’s Sikh students report being teased or harassed because of their Sikh identity. Amongst those who wear turbans or patkas, 3 out of 5 Sikh children have been harassed and verbally or physically abused.

While the vast majority – 85% – of harassment against Sikh students is perpetrated by other students, school staff and faculty members were responsible for almost 5% of the incidents reported in the surveys.6

Racial Profiling

A quarter of Sikh New Yorkers who wear turbans report that they believe they have been unfairly stopped or questioned by law enforcement officers.

Employment Discrimination

Amongst Sikhs who wear turbans, more than one in ten state that they have been refused employment or denied a job promotion because of their Sikh identity.

Access to Public Accommodations

11% of New York City’s Sikh adults reported being refused entry somewhere because they carry a kirpan. Government buildings were the most common place that respondents identified being refused entry because of their kirpans.

Language Access

27% of Sikh non-citizens reported needing the assistance of an English-speaker to interact with hospitals, courts, schools or government agencies. Yet, Punjabi-language resources are only provided by a handful of New York City agencies.

Healthcare

Nearly half of the Sikh immigrants who live in New York City do not have any form of health insurance for themselves or their families.

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6 The remaining 10% of students who reported being harassed did not identify their attacker.

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Harassment & Hate Attacks

Rajinder Singh Khalsa had lived in Queens for nearly a decade before July 11, 2004. But on that day, his experience of what it meant to be an American changed forever. That was the day he was beaten unconscious outside a neighborhood restaurant by fellow New Yorkers who used his religious appearance as an excuse to attack him. When his attackers yelled at Mr. Khalsa to take off the “curtain” on his head, he tried to explain who he was and why Sikhs wear turbans. His attackers – five white men – responded with racial epithets, threats to kill him and blows that left Mr. Khalsa with a broken nose and fractured eye socket.

Four years later, Mr. Khalsa still has trouble coming to terms with what happened that day. He’s haunted by a sense of insecurity and avoids strangers, even on his own block. ‘I realize that not everybody is bad,’ he says, “But I cannot shake off this feeling of danger.”

Sikhs’ identity and distinct appearance make sure that they stand out in any group. But recent conflicts in the Middle East, terrorist threats, and news coverage of these issues have led to especially widespread misconceptions about Sikhs and their religious garb in the years since the attacks of September 11, 2001. Because of their darker skin color, turbans, and beards, Sikh Americans are often targeted in hate crimes or harassed by members of the public and law enforcement agencies alike.

41% of New York City’s Sikhs (children and adults) report being called derogatory names such as “Bin Laden” or “terrorists” by their fellow New Yorkers. 9% of Sikh adults have been physically attacked because of their religious identity. A majority of that violence occurred in Queens, in the years following the 9/11 attacks.

Nearly 6% of the Sikh adults surveyed reported that their personal property has been vandalized because of their Sikh identity. Amongst Sikhs, those who wear turbans or keep long hair are most at risk. Of Sikh adults who wear turbans, 13% report being physically attacked. Over half of New York City’s Sikh adults who keep uncut hair have been verbally abused on the basis of the way they look.

More than one in ten Sikhs surveyed (17%) report being unfairly stopped or questioned by law enforcement officials on account of their turbans. In fact, a quarter of all Sikh New Yorkers who wear turbans report that they have been unfairly stopped or questioned by law enforcement officers. Over one third of these unfair stops occurred in airports.

Seventeen Sikh adults we surveyed reported that a law enforcement officer treated a sacred article of their faith offensively during a search.
Public Accommodation

El Quijote restaurant in Chelsea had had a no-hats policy since it opened its doors in 1930. Sticking to tradition meant that when Jaswinder Pal Singh, a Princeton professor and a practicing Sikh, arrived for a meal at the restaurant with his wife, he was asked to remove his turban. Though Jaswinder Pal understood the intent behind the rule, he was offended at being required to choose between his faith and his dinner. Jaswinder Pal filed a lawsuit against the restaurant and won a judgment of $10,000 in 1999.

Like thousands of New Yorkers, Navdeep Singh liked to keep fit. That’s why he became a member of Planet Fitness, a gymnasium in the Bronx where he worked out regularly for six months before his membership was terminated. It turns out that Planet Fitness had a “no bandanas” policy that they applied to the tight cloth Navdeep tied around his head in lieu of a turban while he worked out. They gave Navdeep a choice between losing his membership or replacing his head covering with a hat instead. Though Navdeep explained that the Sikh faith explicitly prohibits wearing caps or hats instead of cloth turbans or patkas, the management at Planet Fitness terminated his membership.

Federal law prohibits discrimination against any person based on his/her race, national origin, and religion (among other things) in a number of settings, including access to businesses and buildings and federal services. Still, the situation on the ground is at odds with the law as far as Sikhs are concerned.

One in 25 Sikhs we surveyed have been refused service by a private business because of their Sikh identity. Wearing a turban is the most common cause of being refused service by a private business.

Why adults believe they were refused services by private businesses

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7 U.S. Code Title 42, Chapter 21 (Civil Rights), Subchapter II.

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Amongst those who experience the greatest difficulty entering public spaces are Sikhs who carry kirpans. Kirpans are Sikh articles of faith that commonly resemble a sword but vary in length. They are generally worn by all Sikhs who have undergone the amrit (initiation) ceremony. Of the Sikhs surveyed, over 20% – 209 Sikh adults and children – reported carrying kirpans. Those Sikhs are at greater risk of being excluded from civic life.

11% of New York City’s Sikh adults reported being refused entry somewhere because they carry a kirpan. Government buildings were the most common place that respondents identified being refused entry because of their kirpans.

Sikhs who carry kirpans are more likely to be called derogatory names. 55% of the kirpan-wearing Sikhs we surveyed reported being called “Bin Laden,” “terrorists,” or other insulting names.

Ignorance about the kirpan also makes kirpan-carrying Sikhs more vulnerable to police harassment. One in 5 Sikh adults who carry a kirpan claim to have been unfairly stopped or questioned by law enforcement officers. In nearly half of those cases, respondents believed that they had been stopped because of their kirpans.
In the years since 9/11, the Sikh Coalition has worked to create an environment where Sikhs may live, work and study without fear or discrimination. While incidents of bias against Sikhs have decreased markedly since then, Sikh children still frequently face bigoted taunting and physical taunts in New York City’s schools. Where the Sikh articles of faith are often misidentified with terrorism, the challenge for our government and media is to ensure that Sikh children can focus on their education in school – and not on the fear of violence or harassment at the hands of their peers.

**Harassment Statistics in Depth**

Half of the City’s Sikh students report being teased or harassed because of their Sikh identity. For students who attend schools in Queens, that number goes up to 65%.

Amongst those who wear turbans or patkas, harassment and verbal or physical abuse is a part of everyday life for 3 out of 5 Sikh children. Although they are encouraged to proudly follow their faith at home, many must endure taunts and pressure everyday at school. “People underestimate me because of my turban,” one 16-year-old told us. Other Sikh children give up altogether. “I used to wear a turban when I was small. People would say things like ‘Get out of my country’,” reported 16-year-old Gurlovepreet Singh. “After September 11th I cut my hair,” reported an 11-year-old New Yorker. Even girls feel the impact of prejudice. “They make fun of my hairy legs. They make fun of my unibrow. They make fun of my name,” 11-year-old Namprit Kaur told us.

Over one-quarter of the incidents of harassment reported in the children’s surveys involved unwanted physical touching or hitting. Of those children who wear turbans or patkas to school and report having been harassed, 38% have either been physically hit or involuntarily touched because of their appearance. This puts Sikh children in unique physical danger at school.

Similar incidents in a New Jersey high school in 2003, in which classmates dared each other to touch a Sikh student’s turban, led to the Sikh student being severely injured and confined to bed rest for weeks. Three years later, the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights found probable cause that the school had failed to meet its legal obligations when it did not take adequate measures to protect the Sikh student from bias-based harassment.

Nearly half of those children who reported being teased or harassed in New York City schools felt that it was because of their Punjabi or South Asian identity. 47% of them believed that the harassment stemmed from their turbans or patkas, articles of their faith that they wear to school.

**Why students believe they are targeted**

The vast majority – 85% – of this behavior is perpetrated by other students. But what is even more troubling is that school staff and faculty members were responsible for almost 5% of the incidents reported in the surveys. In one case, a school janitor at Richmond Hill High School called a Sikh boy offensive names and threatened him. In another, a teacher at Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn told a Sikh student to remove his turban or he would not be allowed to attend class. The student reportedly did not return to the class all year.

Though the New York City Department of Education’s Disciplinary Code prohibits bias-based harassment, few students are aware that they can or should tell someone if they are being harassed. Of the 216 incidents of harassment identified in children’s survey responses, 40% went unreported. Another 40% of harassment incidents were reported to school personnel, teachers and administrators, but over one-third of those were ignored, according to survey respondents.

More than 10% of Sikh adults remember suffering from discrimination or harassment themselves while they were in school. But few parents know or acknowledge what their own children are going through everyday at school. Only 7% of adults reported that their child has suffered from discrimination or harassment in school. That is much lower than the 50% of students who reported being regularly teased or harassed on account of their Sikh identity.

The children who responded to the survey overwhelmingly expressed a desire to use education to combat their classmates’ prejudices. 65% of Sikh students thought it would be helpful to learn about Sikhism in school or class.

**Problem Schools**

The data we collected in our surveys allowed us to identify schools where Sikh students suffer from a particularly hostile and unwelcoming attitude at the hands of their classmates. These schools are MS 172, PS 62, PS 55, PS 56, Saint Francis Preparatory School, MS 137, PS 161 and Richmond Hill High School. At MS 172, 100% of the Sikh students that we surveyed reported being intimidated or harassed at school on account of their religion. At PS 62 and PS 55, 80% of the Sikh students we surveyed reported being intimidated or harassed.
The graph below identifies the top eight problem schools for Sikh children, based on the percentage of students we surveyed from that school who reported being teased or harassed. “Did not respond” denotes the number of students from that school who did not tell us whether or not they were teased or harassed at that school.

**Problem schools by percentage of overall students we surveyed from that school who reported being teased or harassed on account of their Sikh identity**

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**Beginning to address Bias-Based Bullying in City schools**

Since the June 2007 release of the Sikh Coalition’s report, “Hatred in the Hallways,” the New York City Department of Education has begun to pay some attention to the issue of bias-based harassment in public schools. The Department has published formal guidelines describing how to complain about bias-based harassment, in English and Punjabi, as part of its “Respect for All” initiative. The Department has also pledged to create a harassment hotline where students or parents can call in to report bias-based harassment that they feel is being ignored by school officials.

However, no laws or regulations are in place to prohibit or punish bias-based harassment, with the exception of a few lines buried deep within the Disciplinary Code. Though New York’s City Council passed the Dignity in All Schools Act in 2004 to prevent and track bias-based harassment in schools, Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration has refused to implement it. The Department has also thus far resisted requests to enact a Chancellor’s Regulation defining and prohibiting bias-based harassment in City schools. As a result, there is currently no clear definition of what constitutes bias-based harassment at school, and no complaint or resolution mechanism when it occurs. Because incidents of bullying and harassment are not tracked, city agencies have little knowledge of where to focus their resources and energies in stemming the widespread problem of bias in schools. In addition, very little effort is being made to ensure that the entire teaching workforce is trained to recognize and respond to bias amongst students. This attitude of indifference at the highest levels contributes significantly to the culture amongst individual school administrators, principals and teachers of overlooking harassment even when students report incidents to them.

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Workplace Discrimination & Harassment

For months, Sukhvir Kaur endured taunts and insults about her faith when she stepped into the National Wholesale Liquidators outlet in Queens, where she worked. Sukhvir Kaur was forced to put up with her manager's derogatory comments about her turban and her religion. He wanted her to remove her turban, telling her that her long hair was more "sexy." He called Sikhs “thieves” and “nasty people.” When she complained to his supervisor, her manager even went so far as to forbid her from using the toilet while at work. Ultimately, he fired her from her job.

Sukhvir Kaur finally broke free of her nightmare when she decided to take legal action against National Wholesale Liquidators. Still the mental anguish still continues. She is haunted by memories of the injustice she suffered. But what she wants people to realize, Sukhvir says, is that nothing like this should be happening in this country. “America’s laws are the same for everyone.”

In recent years, bias against workers on religious grounds has reached all time high. The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received over 2500 complaints of religious discrimination in 2006.10 Claims of general harassment topped 23,000 in 2006.11

Because of their religious appearance, Sikhs are disproportionately represented among victims of discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

9% of Sikh adults in New York City report that they have been refused employment or denied a job promotion because of their Sikh identity.

83% of those who were refused employment or denied a job promotion believe it was on account of their turbans. 22% of those who were refused employment or denied a job promotion believe it was on account of their perceived or actual national origin.

Amongst Sikhs who wear turbans, more than one in ten report being refused employment or denied a job promotion because of their Sikh identity.

Though Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 specifically requires employers to take steps to prevent religious harassment of their employees, over 8% of Sikhs report having been harassed in their workplace on account of their religious identity.

The New York City Metropolitan Transportation Authority, a government agency, was the employer most often identified by employees as allowing workplace harassment of Sikhs.

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Healthcare has been the subject of numerous controversies, reform efforts and candidate speeches in recent months. For New York City's Sikh community, the debate is a particularly critical one, given the sizeable uninsured segment of the Sikh American population.

35% of Sikh adults reported that not everyone in their family has health insurance. That is more than double the national average of 15.9% of Americans who are uninsured.12

Sikhs who are non-citizens are about two and a half times less likely to have health insurance than those who are citizens. 20% of Sikh citizens reported that not everyone in their family has health insurance, compared to almost half of non-citizens (49.4%) who reported not having health insurance for themselves or their families.

Health insurance is particularly difficult to come by in the construction industry. Of those Sikhs who reported working in construction, 62% do not have health insurance for themselves or for their families. Nationwide, the construction industry has been found to be the most dangerous line of work, accounting for 21% of all workplace deaths.13 Given the nature of their work, Sikhs in this industry are particularly at high risk.

Being self-employed does not decrease or increase a Sikh's chances of being insured. Nearly equal numbers of self-employed Sikhs are insured as are uninsured.

Five percent of New York City's Sikh adults reported being afraid to seek hospital or medical services because they feared that they or their families would be deported. This is despite the City's strong stance against medical facilities sharing information with Immigration Customs Enforcement officials.

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Language Access

Many of New York’s Sikh residents have immigrated to this country over the last 50 years. Since some are only able to speak their native tongue, Punjabi, language access to services becomes an obstacle for many Sikhs in their everyday lives. The 2000 U.S. Census revealed that in 28% of Punjabi-speaking homes, nobody over the age of 14 speaks English “very well.” As a result, older members of the family can become dependent on their children for translation services, often straining relationships and placing an undue burden on the child. In addition, language access is a fundamental barrier for many Sikh New Yorkers to attaining crucial social services such as healthcare or education. Chancellor’s Regulation A-663 mandates translation and interpretation services by the New York City Department of Education, but has not been diligently enforced.

75% of New York City’s Sikh adults identify Punjabi as their primary language. Among those who provided an address in Queens, nearly 9 out of 10 identify Punjabi as their primary language.

Over 17% of Sikh adults report having difficulty understanding English language forms issued by government agencies, hospitals, schools or courts and need the assistance of an English-speaker while dealing with those institutions.

Non-citizens are more likely to require the assistance of an English-speaker to deal with hospitals, courts, schools or government agencies. 27% of Sikh non-citizens reported needing this help.

Yet, access to Punjabi-language materials or services are only provided by a handful of New York City agencies. These include the 3-1-1 Information Hotline, the New York City Department of Education, the New York City Police Department, the Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence, the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, the New York Immigration Hotline and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

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14 See Bajaj, Leung & Tucker, Building Bridges: Increasing Language Access for the Asian Pacific American Community of New York City, CACF, January 2006 (pg. 4).
16 Respondents were permitted to choose more than one primary language.
Sikh Civil Rights Agenda

The following recommendations constitute an agenda that would protect the civil rights and human rights of New York City’s Sikh community. In the coming months and years, our goal will be to urge government agencies and private actors to implement these recommendations not just for our own community, but for the benefit of all New Yorkers.

Harassment and Hate Crimes

For the New York City Council:

* Pass the Hate Crime Backlash Prevention Act (Intro. 148), which directs the Hate Crime Taskforce of the New York Police Department (NYPD) to oversee the creation of a plan to mitigate hate violence in the wake of any event that may cause an increase in such violence against identifiable groups as defined in the administrative code of the city of New York §8-102.

For New York City District Attorneys:

* Train city prosecutors on the ways and the circumstances under which Sikhs have been particularly susceptible to hate violence.
* Work to ensure that the prosecution of persons for hate crimes against Sikhs is well-publicized within the Sikh community.
* Visit Sikh gurdwaras to ensure New York City Sikhs know they can be protected from hate violence.

For the New York City Police Department:

* Train all New York City police officers to recognize the vulnerability of Sikhs to becoming victims of hate crimes, and to identify the hate element, if present, of crimes against Sikh Americans.
* Visit Sikh gurdwaras to ensure New York City Sikhs know they can be protected from hate violence.

For the Media:

* Acknowledge that constant and frequent images of turbans, beards and terrorism since 9/11 have the unintended but real effect of promoting ignorance that leads to bias and violence against Sikhs.
* Use a part of your media outlet’s resources to promote social education on Sikhs in order to discourage bias against Sikhs and encourage appreciation of diversity.

For Sikh Community Leaders:

* Create a backlash plan to deal with hate crimes that may occur against Sikhs in the wake of another terrorist attack or similar incident. Such a plan should include measures to be taken if the gurdwara becomes a target, support for members of the community who are victimized, and outreach efforts to local law enforcement officials.
* Provide a quick response to local media outlets that misrepresent Sikhs in their news coverage. Write a letter to the editor, call the news desk to register your complaint and encourage other Sikhs to do the same. Action from a local audience is a sure way to ensure appropriate media coverage in your neighborhood.
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Bias in Schools

For The New York City Department of Education:

* Implement the Dignity in All Schools Act, a law passed by the City Council in 2004 that would protect students by prohibiting and tracking bias-based harassment in New York City’s public schools.

* Enact a Chancellor’s Regulation defining and prohibiting bias-based harassment in City schools.

* Develop a protocol for dealing with complaints of bias-based harassment in an effective and timely manner. This protocol should be widely publicized in schools and among parents.

* Incorporate education about Sikhs and Sikh practices into the school curriculum as a means of encouraging appreciation for diversity and discouraging prejudice and hate.

* Ensure that all teachers, administrators and other school personnel receive cultural diversity training and are aware that Sikh children have been especially vulnerable to bias and harassment in school.

* All school personnel should be educated on how to address complaints of bias-based harassment brought to them by students or parents.

Unlawful Profiling

For The New York City Police Department:

* Mandate Sikh awareness training for all officers and personnel. In addition, known religious sensitivities must be taken into account when interacting with Sikhs in New York City.

* Make good on New York City’s no-profiling pledge by instituting a credible check on profiling by collecting data on the racial or ethnic identity of people stopped and searched in subways by the NYPD.

* When renewing calls for the public to report suspicious behavior, stress in your message that reports need to be made regardless of a person’s race, ethnicity or religion.

For the New York State Governor and Legislature:

* Establish a policy that requires that state employees keep confidential the immigration status of state residents who interact with state and local government. Enact legislation or a change in state administrative policy to limit local and state police enforcement of civil immigration laws, including restricting localities from “deputizing” local police to perform immigration functions (A7855 Rivera, P.).

For Transportation Security Agency Personnel at New York Airports:

* Implement monitoring mechanisms to ensure that TSA personnel are not unlawfully profiling when they decide to pull a passenger aside for additional screening at security checkpoints. All TSA personnel should receive mandatory training on Sikhs and Sikh practices.

For Sikh Community Leaders:

* Reach out and establish relationships with your local law enforcement officials. Offer to conduct Sikh awareness trainings or provide resource materials on Sikhs and Sikh practices for officers to review.
**Employment Discrimination**

For All New York City Agencies:
* Offer employment to Sikhs regardless of their religion in an effort to encourage diversity and lead by example. Specifically, agencies such as the New York Police Department, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and the New York City Fire Department should not be permitted to discriminate against Sikh employees based on their religious appearance.
* Step up recruitment of Sikh employees by participating in minority job fairs on university campuses and Sikh job fairs at gurdwaras and Sikh youth conferences.

For New York City Council:
* Pass and enforce the New York City Workplace Religious Freedom Restoration Act (Intro. 146), permitting city employees to exercise their right to religious freedom by wearing religious garb at work.

For Sikh Community Leaders:
* Sponsor and publicize equal opportunity job fairs at Sikh community centers and events.

**Access to Public Accommodations**

For All New York City Agencies:
* Create security policies for government buildings that do not interfere with a Sikh’s practice of their faith.

For the New York Human Rights Commission:
* Aggressively pursue all cases of discrimination by private businesses that refuse services or entry to Sikhs on account of their articles of faith.
* Provide Punjabi-language materials to inform Sikhs of their right against discrimination when entering a place of public accommodation, and the method of redress.

**Language Access**

For All New York City Agencies:
* Prioritize the hiring of bilingual and bicultural staff throughout New York City facilities, especially of those agencies that provide crucial services such as the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the New York City Department of Education.
* Work with colleges and universities to recruit and financially support the education of bilingual students.
* Develop a compensation plan for staff members who are bilingual.
* Train all city employees who interact with members of the public to identify language and dialect needs.
* Develop protocols on language assistance services that are to be easily and readily accessible to staff.
* Provide materials translated into Punjabi, the language spoken by most Sikh residents of New York City. Such materials should be disseminated to the community in a timely and extensive manner.
* Track all requests for Punjabi-language translation and interpretation services. The resulting data can be used to design, monitor and evaluate service delivery for the Sikh community.

For the New York City Department of Education:
* Provide translated report cards for limited English proficient parents.
* Add Punjabi to the list of languages into which all DoE materials are translated.
* Track and coordinate the distribution of translated materials to DoE offices, schools and parents.
* Provide translated materials to schools at the same time as English-language materials.
* Improve the availability and accessibility of interpretation services by ensuring that all teachers and school administrators are aware of the need and method to engage interpreters and by providing interpretation services (by headphones or on-site interpreters) at Parent Teacher Association meetings, School Leadership conferences, and Parent-Teacher conferences.

For the New York City Council:
* Hold yearly hearings and request data on the use of funds regarding Chancellor’s Regulation A-663.

For the New York State Governor and Legislature:
* Strengthen accountability to ensure English-Language Learners receive the legally-required instructional services to which they are entitled and that funds intended for ELLs are spent solely on ESL, bilingual and other appropriate ELL programs.
* Amend the Teachers for Tomorrow program to make bilingual and ESL teachers, as well as bilingual guidance counselors, social workers, special education service staff, and psychiatric and psychological staff eligible for scholarships, tuition assistance and loan forgiveness programs (A4384, Espaillat).
* Require state and local health, labor, housing, and human services agencies to provide Punjabi-speaking interpreters and translated materials to ensure access to government services by limited-English-proficient Sikh New Yorkers (falls under S2472 Parker /A5077 Espaillat).
* Create a centralized, multilingual communication initiative across state agencies that will translate public notices and benefits materials, staff information and complaint lines into Punjabi, and develop interpreter standards and credentialing.
* Increase funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages through the Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program.

For Sikh Community Leaders:
* Provide and encourage Sikhs to attend ESL classes in community centers and gurdwaras.
* Publicize and enhance the availability of professional translators to community members and government agencies.
* Discourage the use of children and family members as translators for those members of the community who do not speak English.
Healthcare

For the New York City Department of Health & Mental Services:
* Expand Primary Care to underserved communities
* Ensure that Queens-area hospitals are effectively implementing their legally-mandated Language Assistance programs for Punjabi-speakers. Specifically, the Department must ensure that hospitals near Richmond Hill and Flushing, Queens:
  (a) provide forms and instructions for Punjabi speakers, including information about how to file a language access complaint;
  (b) provide English-proficiency interpreters for Punjabi speakers within a reasonable amount of time of receiving a patient’s request;
  (c) post proper signage in public areas in Punjabi to inform patients about free language assistance services; and
  (d) are not encouraging the use of non-hospital personnel as translators for the Punjabi-speaking Sikh community.

For the New York City Mayor and City Council:
* Mandate health insurance for workers in the construction industry.
* Commission an outreach campaign to Sikh New Yorkers to dispel fears that keep many from seeking free city health care.
* Invest in the New York Immigration Coalition’s health care consumer navigation program, which links uninsured New Yorkers to a regular source of medical care and helps to resolve insurance and billing problems.
* Hold district Social Service and Medicaid offices accountable for providing legally mandated (Local Law 73) communication assistance for Limited English Proficient clients.

For the New York State Legislature:
* Pass S3686 (Sabini)/ A6288 (Gottfried) to enable hospitals and clinics to receive Medicaid reimbursement for providing interpretation and translation services to Punjabi-speaking patients.
* Create universal health insurance coverage for New York residents, including immigrants.

For New York Hospitals:
* Queens-based hospitals should establish a network of Punjabi-speaking primary health care providers to whom Sikh patients can be referred for linguistic and cultural reasons.
* Punjabi-language information relating to Sikhs and alcoholism should be available for Sikh patients.
* Train staff and administrators to discourage the use of informal interpreters in the medical setting. Federal, state and local laws require health care professionals to provide language assistance to limited-English proficient speakers. Staff members should be trained on these laws and the protocol for providing interpretation services for patients.¹⁷

For Sikh Community Leaders:
* Encourage community members to make use of City’s resources to assert their health care rights.

Glossary

Gurdwara: A Sikh place of worship. Gurdwaras also often functions as a Sikh community center.

Judha: The topknot of hair that many Sikhs use to keep their hair tucked under turbans or patkas.

Kirpan: A Sikh article of faith that commonly resembles a sword, but varies in length, and the portion representative of a “blade” is often not sharp. Although there is no prescribed length, kirpans are often six to eight inches in length; about half of that length is usually representative of the “hilt” and the other half, the “blade.” As a matter of practice, a kirpan is kept in a tight sheath.

Dastaar: Turbans mandated to be worn by Sikhs over their uncut hair.

Patka: A small, square piece of cloth tied tightly to the head. Patkas are often worn by young Sikh boys in lieu of full turbans.

Articles of Faith: The external identity of a Sikh is made up of five articles of faith. Collectively, these represent a Sikh’s love and commitment for their Guru (prophet). The five articles are

- Kanga: A comb
- Kirpan: A religious sword
- Kacherra: Special long underwear
- Kara: An iron bracelet
- Kes: Unshorn, uncut hair

Men must and women may wear turbans, the traditional head covering for Sikhs’ uncut hair.

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About the Sikh Coalition

The Sikh Coalition was born in the aftermath of bigotry, violence and discrimination against New York City’s Sikh population following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. We began as a volunteer effort on the night of September 11, 2001, when an elderly Sikh and two teenagers were violently attacked in Richmond Hill, Queens in “reprisal” attacks by fellow Americans.

The Sikh Coalition formally incorporated on October 18, 2001, and began operating as a volunteer led organization of concerned Sikhs across the country. No other national civil rights-focused Sikh organization existed at that time. By October 25, 2001, the newly formed Sikh Coalition had its first major victory - persuading the United States Senate to pass a resolution we drafted, recognizing Sikh-Americans and condemning hate crimes against Sikhs and other minorities.

Since then, we have provided direct legal services to 81 victims of hate crimes, 68 victims of airport profiling, and 22 Sikhs who were prosecuted for carrying the kirpan, a Sikh article of faith. The rest are selectively chosen from around the country when victims requesting assistance have no other means of support.

The Sikh Coalition works towards the realization of civil and human rights for all people. In particular, we focus on a world where Sikhs may freely practice and enjoy their faith while fostering strong relations with their local communities, wherever they may be.

We pursue our mission by:

* Providing direct legal services to people whose civil or human rights are violated;
* Advocating for law and policies that are respectful of fundamental rights;
* Promoting appreciation for diversity through education; and
* Fostering civic engagement in order to promote local community empowerment.