

January 25, 2011

Governor Jerry Brown
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Protecting the Civil Rights of State Employees

Dear Governor Brown:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to request your support in the cause of protecting civil rights and equal opportunity for all Californians.

On November 10, 2008, after a two-day trial, the California State Personnel Board's Appeal Division (SPB) determined that Mr. Trilochan Singh Oberoi—a California Sikh—suffered unlawful workplace discrimination at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). Mr. Oberoi was denied a job as a corrections officer in Folsom, California because of his beard, which Sikhs keep uncut in accordance with their religious beliefs. According to SPB, officials at CDCR failed to explore reasonable accommodations for Mr. Oberoi, as required by law, even though beard exemptions were allowed for individuals with medical needs, and despite the fact that Sikhs have been able to wear respirators in compliance with safety requirements in uniformed services throughout the world, including the United States Army.

Now, more than two years *after* a final adjudication in Mr. Oberoi's favor, the office of California Attorney General Kamala Harris is using California taxpayer dollars to vigorously oppose the right of Mr. Oberoi to work as a state corrections officer, thus jeopardizing the civil rights of Sikhs, Muslims, Jews, and indeed all others who still face the ignominy of having to choose between religious freedom and a job. We find the California Attorney General's adversarial posture in this case to be demeaning to religious minorities and utterly inconsistent with your own obligation to defend civil rights for all Californians.

In light of the foregoing concerns, we respectfully urge you to use your authority to restore the civil rights of Mr. Oberoi without delay and send a clear message to all state agencies in California that unlawful discrimination will not be tolerated. We want to ensure that California is on the forefront of civil rights in the United States and look forward to partnering with you in the coming years on efforts to promote and protect civil rights for all people in California.

Respectfully submitted,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California
American Jewish Committee
Anti-Defamation League
Apna Ghar, Inc. (Our Home)
Asian American Bar Association of the Greater Bay Area
Asian American Justice Center
Asian Law Caucus
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Asian Pacific American Legal Center, a member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty
California Sikh Council
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for Islamic Pluralism
Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) California
Counselors Helping (South) Asians/Indians, Inc. (CHAI)
Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC)
Interfaith Alliance
Islamic Shura Council of Southern California
Japanese American Citizens League
Laotian American National Alliance (LANA)
Legal Aid Society - Employment Law Center
MAI Family Services
Muslim Community Association of the San Francisco Bay Area (MCA)
Muslim Public Affairs Council
Narika
Northern California Islamic Council (NCIC)
OCA
The Sikh Coalition
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
South Asian Network (SAN)
South Bay Islamic Association (SBIA)
Trikone-Northwest
UNITED SIKHS