

## Community Impact Statement

May 18, 2017

Your honor, thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of the Sikh community this morning.

My name is Pawanpreet Kaur (Dhaliwal). I am a member of the Sikh community and an attorney with the Sikh Coalition, a national civil rights organization that advocates for Sikhs in the United States. In particular, we counsel Sikhs who have been subjected to hate crimes, profiling and discrimination based on their faith.

Sikhs' core beliefs include devotion to God, truthful living and social justice. Sikhs believe that God is loving and merciful, and has no enemies. We strive to be the same. Sikhs believe in the concept of "chardhi kalaa" – to maintain eternal optimism in the face of oppression. It is this faith and resilience that sustains us during difficult times.

Sikhs, who are recognizable by their unique religious appearance, including turbans and unshorn hair, first migrated to the West Coast of the United States in the early 1900s. Sikhs have been an integral part of the country's fabric ever since — working as farm laborers, truck drivers, IT workers, doctors, lawyers, and everything in between. In spite of our longstanding presence in this country and in the Bay Area, Sikhs have been disproportionately targeted for hate crimes.

The first recorded act of hate violence against Sikhs in this country was in 1907 in Bellingham, WA. Hundreds of members of the Asiatic Exclusion League attacked South Asian immigrants, most of whom were Sikh and were working in local lumber mills.

The first post-9/11 backlash fatality was a Sikh-American gas station owner named Balbir Singh Sodhi. He was shot by a man who, when arrested, called himself a patriot.

In 2012, Wade Michael Page, an active participant in the white supremacist music scene, shot and killed 6 parishioners at a gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, in what was at that time the deadliest attack on any house of worship in the United States.

There have been hundreds, if not thousands, more hate crimes against Sikhs in this country, including this attack against Mr. Khalsa.

Recently, we have seen an uptick in hate violence against not only Sikhs, but other minority communities, as well. There have been countless attacks on Muslims and arson to mosques, bomb threats to Jewish community centers and schools, and the murders of an Indian immigrant in Kansas and an African-American man in New York.

Hate violence inflicts terror on entire communities and poses a fundamental threat to our democracy. The attack on Mr. Khalsa led to feelings of concern and fear amongst Sikhs throughout the Bay Area and the nation, including members of the El Sobrante Sikh congregation.

A bias-based attack like this one does not happen in a vacuum. The underlying causes of hate violence are complex, and there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done to make our communities safe for all. Everyone must play a part. We need government leaders to condemn both bias-based violence and discriminatory policies, and allocate appropriate resources for combatting hate; we need law enforcement to identify and prosecute hate crimes; we need our media to not just shine a spotlight on hate violence and discrimination, but also showcase the multifaceted experiences of diverse

communities; and we need to build inter-communal solidarity through education and outreach, through getting to know those who may be different from us.

To that end, we thank the Richmond Police Department and the Contra Costa County District Attorney's office for their vigorous investigation and prosecution of this matter. We also thank the broader community in the Bay Area and across the country for their tremendous outpouring of support for Mr. Khalsa and the Sikh community.

We ask Mr. Little and Mr. Leblanc to take time and learn about people they perceive as different, and to work in service towards others. As Mr. Khalsa himself shared today, as Sikhs, we believe in universal brotherhood. This means that you are our brothers. We pray for you to find peace and healing, and one day see us as your brothers and sisters, too.

Thank you.