

Swarn Singh Victim Impact Statement
State v. Rory Whitney Benson 17-1-08390-5
December 14, 2018

Your Honor, thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this court.

My name is Swarn Singh. I immigrated to the United States from India in 2011. I live in SeaTac, WA with my wife and daughter. I work very hard as a taxi driver every day, often 12 hours a day, to support my family.

As a Sikh, I am mandated to wear a turban and to keep my hair and beard unshorn to live in harmony with the will of God. My turban distinguishes me and it reminds me of the deep beliefs of my faith, including working hard and honestly, sharing with the needy, and promoting the equality of all humankind. Wearing my turban is a commitment to uphold the values of the Sikh faith, including compassion, honesty, kindness, and service.

On December 16, 2017, I received a dispatch to go to the Seattle VA Hospital. I picked up Mr. Benson and his mother and I drove them to an apartment building in Bellevue. I had just parked in front of their building, when suddenly Mr. Benson attacked me. He grabbed the towel I normally use to wipe my windshield and tried to suffocate me. I didn't understand what was happening. I was terrified. I got out of my taxi as fast as I could but Mr. Benson chased me through the parking lot. Then, he took a hammer out of his bag and started hitting my turban and my head so hard that my turban was knocked to the ground. I suffered a scalp laceration and a fractured skull as a result of the attack.

On December 16, 2017, my life was changed forever. I don't think I will ever fully recover from this attack. I thought Mr. Benson was going to kill me. I still work as a taxi driver every day to support my family, but I can't drive at night anymore. I am too scared. It has been almost a year since the attack, and I still have to take anxiety medication.



I believe Mr. Benson purposely targeted my turban when he attacked me. My turban is not just a piece of cloth. It is a religious commitment. When I tie it on my head every morning, I do it very carefully, never letting the cloth touch the ground. I believe that when my turban is tied, it ceases to be a piece of cloth, and becomes one and the same with my body. I do not let people touch my turban. In fact, removing a Sikh's turban is one of the most humiliating things anyone can do to a Sikh. It symbolizes denying that person the right to belong to the Sikh faith.

When Mr. Benson attacked my turban, he attacked my identity. He attacked my faith, my dignity, and my entire community.

In my religion, we believe that all human beings are one. We believe that all people are equal, regardless of our many differences. I understand that Mr. Benson is a military veteran and he has mental health issues. I sincerely hope he gets the help that he needs. I still consider him my brother, and I hope that he will learn about my community, and one day consider me his brother too.

Thank you.

