



## NEED LEGAL HELP?

We provide free and confidential legal assistance to Sikhs who have been discriminated against or subject to bias based upon their Sikh beliefs or identity.

### To request help:

[www.sikhcoalition.org/legalhelp](http://www.sikhcoalition.org/legalhelp)  
or call at 212-655-3095



## ਕਨੂੰਨੀ ਮਦਦ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ?

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### ਮਦਦ ਲਈ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਸਤੇ:

[www.sikhcoalition.org/legalhelp](http://www.sikhcoalition.org/legalhelp)

ਨੂੰ ਖੋਲ੍ਹੋ ਜਾਂ 212-655-3095

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Text **SIKH** to **52886** to join the movement!

THE SIKHCOALITION



# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: THE KIRPAN



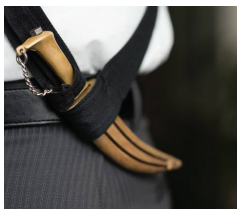
THE SIKHCOALITION

## WHAT IS SIKHISM (SIKHI)?

Sikhism is the fifth largest world religion. The Sikh religion is monotheistic, believing in one God that is all eternal, all pervading, and all equal. Sikhs maintain **five articles of faith**, an external uniform to bind them to the beliefs of the religion. They are a daily reminder that Sikhs must live an honest, moral, kind, brave, and loving life.

## WHAT IS A KIRPAN?

- **A kirpan is a mandatory Sikh article of faith.** It is carried by Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs at all times.
- A kirpan resembles a knife or sword. There is no prescribed length or sharpness for a kirpan in Sikhism; they are determined by the individual religious convictions of the wearer. Kirpans are typically sheathed and worn with a gatra (a strap) underneath clothing.
- The kirpan obligates a Sikh to the ideals of generosity, compassion and service to humanity. It acts as a reminder to its bearer of a Sikh's solemn duty to protect the weak and promote justice for all.



## IS IT LEGAL TO WEAR A KIRPAN? **YES**

- **Employers, public and private building security, and public school districts nationwide routinely provide accommodations for Sikhs to wear kirpans** and other articles of faith.
- On rare occasions, Sikhs have been mistakenly arrested and charged under anti-weapons statutes for carrying kirpans. **However, criminal charges for carrying the kirpan are consistently dropped by prosecutors or dismissed by judges** because of the kirpan's religious nature and Sikhs' benign intent in wearing it.

See e.g., *State of Ohio v. Harjinder Singh*, 690 N.E.2d 917, 920 (Ohio Ct. App. 1996) (court held kirpan was a religious article and not a mere weapon); *New York v. Partap Singh*, 516 N.Y.S.2d 412 (1987) (weapons charges against kirpan-wearing Sikh dismissed).

- **Courts and prosecutors consistently refuse to apply anti-weapons statutes to kirpans** even when the "bladed" sections of Sikhs' kirpans are longer than allowed by anti-knife laws.

See, e.g., *City of Detroit v. Sukhpreet Singh Garcha*, Slip op., No. Z-775606 (36th Dist. Ct., City of Detroit) (refusing to apply Detroit's anti-weapons statute to Sikh student's ten-inch kirpan).