February 2nd, 2021

North Carolina State Board of Education  
301 N Wilmington St,  
Raleigh, NC 27601

Dear Superintendent Truitt and State Board of Education members,

We write to provide our feedback for the current iteration of North Carolina’s K-12 Social Studies Standards, for entry into the official public record.

As the nation’s largest Sikh civil rights organization, we continue to work with the Sikh community in North Carolina to support their wish to see Sikhism taught in classrooms alongside other major world religions. We have been engaging in the review process for over a year since January 2020, and working with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) to ensure that meaningful and accurate teaching about Sikhism will be supported through the content and examples which are to be finalized once new standards are passed.

The ongoing debates around the content of the new draft are indicative of the deep political divides we have as a nation and the chasm between those who already have a voice in our classrooms and those who are most frequently left out. It would be disingenuous to not share how devastating it was to listen to the hearing on January 27th where it was argued that racial inequality and discrimination don’t exist. Working on behalf of the Sikh community, I know this leaves many North Carolina Sikhs equally concerned and disappointed.

While we don’t agree, we can respect these dissenting opinions, and hope this does not lead to the rejection of increasing inclusivity and diversity in the new standards. These issues matter deeply to the tens of thousands of students who feel underrepresented in North Carolina’s classrooms, including those from religious minorities. In fact, the current debates continue to highlight how crucial it is to secure safe and inclusive classrooms for all, and accurate representation of communities, including when teaching about world religions.

We wish to voice our support of the NCDPI’s commitment to present standards to the State Board of Education which aim for inclusivity and diversity, and we remain an ally in ensuring that all children feel represented in the classroom. When racism, discrimination and identity are not adequately addressed by teachers, children from minority communities such as ours, are deeply impacted by those omissions, and as a result, bullying and bias continue to persist at alarming rates.

We have worked in 14 states including New Jersey, Texas, New York, California, Idaho, Tennessee, Colorado, Arizona, Oklahoma, Michigan, North Dakota, Nebraska, Indiana, and Kansas, to successfully advocate for more inclusive and diverse standards. We hope to see North Carolina join that list by passing standards which will serve all North Carolina’s communities and provide students with the necessary skills to engage positively with diversity in our globalized world.

Yours sincerely,

Satjeet Kaur  
Executive Director  
The Sikh Coalition