



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** Res 0863-2023, **Version:** \*

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### Preconsidered Res. No. 863

Resolution condemning recent attacks on members of the Sikh community in the City of New York and seeking a swift end to any discrimination against Sikh New Yorkers.

By The Speaker (Council Member Adams) and Council Members Yeger, Velázquez, Cabán, Won, Hanif, Restler, Gennaro, Dinowitz and Rivera

Whereas, Sikhism is a religion originating in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent in 1469, which follows the teachings of Guru Nanak and whose tenets include social equality, service to others, and devotion to God; and

Whereas, Following the annexation by the British of the Punjab province in 1849, in hopes of securing a better economic future, some Sikhs with a background in agriculture immigrated to the United States (U.S.); and

Whereas, According to the University of California at Davis, during the 1940s, due to discrimination and xenophobia against many Asian immigrants, Sikhs were met with newly enacted discriminatory laws branding most immigrants ineligible from holding leases on agricultural lands or securing U.S. citizenship; and

Whereas, These restrictions caused Sikh immigrants to secure employment as laborers for railroad construction projects and lumber mills and eventually to accept work as farm laborers; and

Whereas, According to the University of California at Davis, despite their significant contributions to building the infrastructure of America, a fundamental misunderstanding and mistrust of Sikhs by white Americans have led to acts of violence and discrimination against many Sikh communities since their arrival in the 19th century; and

Whereas, One memorable example of violence against Sikhs came in 1907, when a crowd of 600 white

men drove 400 Sikh Americans out of Bellingham, Washington; and

Whereas, Almost 95 years later, the Sikh Coalition, an advocacy group, was founded in New York City (NYC) on the night of 9/11, as a result of an assault on an elderly Sikh man and two teenagers and in anticipation of the coming ill-informed backlash against the Sikh community, with a goal of raising awareness about Sikh Americans and defending their civil rights; and

Whereas, Despite the fact that Sikhism is the world's fifth-largest religion, with more than 25 million followers worldwide and about 500,000 in the U.S. today, a 2015 national survey conducted in the U.S. by Hart Research Associates found that about 60 percent of Americans admitted they knew nothing at all about Sikh Americans; and

Whereas, According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting Program publication *Hate Crime Statistics, 2020*, total hate crimes in 2020 were at their highest since 2008 and were thought to be underreported; and

Whereas, According to *Hate Crime Statistics, 2020*, there were 67 anti-Sikh hate crimes, an increase of 37 percent over 2019; and

Whereas, In response to the upward trend in FBI figures, Sim J. Singh Attariwala, Sikh Coalition Senior Policy and Advocacy Manager, noted that, in the days following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the Coalition "tracked more than 300 instances of hate and bias against Sikhs," perhaps in part because the Sikh faith requires men not to shave or cut their hair and to wrap their hair inside turbans, which unfortunately associates them with a negative and bigoted stereotype of what some people believe terrorists look like; and

Whereas, Kiran Kaur Gill, Executive Director of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund, explained that hate crimes against Sikh Americans are not always reported to or properly classified by law enforcement agencies and noted the FBI's practice of categorizing hate crimes by the apparent bias of the attacker rather than the actual identity of the victim; and

Whereas, Gill further explained that the number of hate crimes does not include many other incidents of bias, such as abusive speech or bullying, and that better data collection is needed in order to shed light on the true size of the problem; and

Whereas, A 2014 study by the Sikh Coalition reported that about 54 percent of all Sikh American school-age children have been bullied at school, but that 67 percent of Sikh American children wearing turbans have experienced bullying; and

Whereas, The Sikh Coalition study also reported that about 51 percent of Sikh American youth did not feel that school officials did enough to stop the bullying they faced; and

Whereas, According to a 2007 Sikh Coalition Advocacy Survey, there were an estimated 50,000 Sikhs living in Queens, based upon reported membership in Sikh places of worship; and

Whereas, According to the 2021 American Community Survey, the estimate of the number of Sikhs living in metropolitan New York was almost 80,000, with a strong concentration in Richmond Hill, Queens; and

Whereas, In October, 2023, Jasmer Singh, a Sikh man in his 60s who came from India to the U.S. to raise his family, was brutally assaulted after a minor traffic accident in Queens and has since died from the injuries inflicted by the other driver; and

Whereas, The other driver has been arrested and charged with manslaughter and assault, but not with a hate crime; and

Whereas, Singh's son, who believes that his father, who was wearing a turban, was actually the victim of a hate crime, said, "Consider the safety of the Sikh community, please, that nobody would lose the father, brother, or son, like I did"; now, therefore be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York condemns recent attacks on members of the Sikh community in the City of New York and seeks a swift end to any discrimination against Sikh New Yorkers.

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12/11/2023  
RHP