

January 9, 2017

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
United States Senate

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
United States Senate

Re: Attorney General Nomination

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein:

As the largest Sikh American civil rights organization in the United States, the Sikh Coalition respectfully requests that the Senate Judiciary Committee make the following inquiries of Senator Jeff Sessions while reviewing his nomination to serve as Attorney General:

1. Hate Crimes - In a Trump Administration, will the U.S. Department of Justice continue to vigorously prosecute hate crimes, including anti-Sikh hate crimes, under the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 (the "Matthew Shepard Act")?
2. School Bullying - In a Trump Administration, will the U.S. Department of Justice continue to hold school districts accountable under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for failing to protect students, including Sikh American students, against bullying, harassment, and physical violence?

Sikh Americans, especially those who wear turbans and maintain uncut hair in accordance with their faith, have experienced an avalanche of hate crimes in the post-9/11 environment. For example, on August 5, 2012, a neo-Nazi gunman massacred six worshippers and permanently injured several others, including a law enforcement officer, at a gurdwara (Sikh house of worship) in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

In cases where state and local officials lack the capacity or expertise to investigate and prosecute these attacks as hate crimes, the U.S. Department of Justice serves as a critical backstop to ensure that victims receive the fullest measure of justice.¹

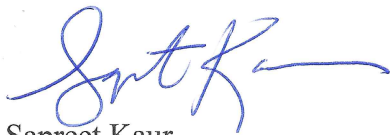
¹ See, e.g., Press Release, U.S. Department of Justice, "Washington State Man Pleads Guilty to Federal Hate Crime in Attack on Sikh Man," (Jun. 27, 2013), available at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/washington-state-man-pleads-guilty-federal-hate-crime-attack-sikh-man>

Even our children are being attacked. According to Sikh Coalition research, a majority of observant Sikh students that we surveyed in four cities nationwide were bullied and harassed because of their religion, with some even experiencing physical violence.²

In cases where state and local school officials ignore these problems and students have no other recourse, the Educational Opportunities Section at the U.S. Department of Justice has intervened to ensure that students enjoy a safe and healthy learning environment.³

We note with appreciation that our engagement with the U.S. Department of Justice began during the Bush Administration shortly after the inception of the Sikh Coalition in 2001 and continued unabated during the Obama Administration. We hope this engagement will remain strong in the coming years, with no deterioration in the agency's enforcement of civil rights laws, including the Matthew Shepard Act and the Civil Right Act of 1964, and no diminution in its commitment to protecting the civil rights of all Americans.

Sincerely,



Sapreet Kaur
Executive Director
The Sikh Coalition

cc: Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

² See Sikh Coalition, *"Go Home Terrorist": A Report on Bullying of Sikh American School Children* (2014), available at <https://issuu.com/thesikhcoalition/docs/go-home-terrorist/3>

³ See, e.g., Press Release, U.S. Department of Justice, "Department of Justice Reaches Settlement to Resolve Complaints of Religious Harassment at Charter School in DeKalb County, Georgia," (May 7, 2013), available at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/departement-justice-reaches-settlement-resolve-complaints-religious-harassment-charter-school>