

Monday, April 8, 2024

The Honorable Michael McCarthy
113 Bank St.
St. Albans, VT 05478

RE: S.220, An act relating to Vermont's public libraries (SUPPORT)

Dear Representative McCarthy,

The Sikh Coalition is proud to support [S.220](#). This bill will ensure equal access to libraries and school libraries without discrimination, safeguard against arbitrary removal of materials based on personal, political, or religious views which will promote inclusivity and diversity.

Sikhism, the world's fifth largest religion with more than 25 million followers worldwide, has had a significant presence here in the United States since the start of the 20th century.

Founded in response to the post 9/11 wave of bias against Sikh Americans, the Sikh Coalition is the nation's largest Sikh American civil rights and advocacy organization. Over the past 20 years, we have evolved into a professional organization dedicated to defending and expanding Sikh civil rights in the United States. A key part of this work includes advocacy for more inclusive laws, as well as pushing for increased awareness and understanding of Sikhism through proactive education and community development efforts. This entails calling for inclusive education through the improvement of social studies standards, educational materials, textbooks, professional development initiatives for educators, and more.

The Sikh Coalition supports this legislation because books play such a crucial role in fostering understanding and unity among diverse communities and in broadening the minds of all students. When books that shed light on marginalized groups are banned, students miss out on the opportunity to explore cultures and perspectives outside of their own and develop positive associations with the diverse communities around them. As one such marginalized community, Sikhs—and Sikh youths—experience the effects of both bias and erasure firsthand: A [2014 report](#) by the Sikh Coalition found that 50 percent of Sikh children are bullied—and that number jumps to 67 percent, twice the national average, for turbaned Sikh students. One of the best ways to keep Sikh students safe from such bullying is through meaningful, constitutionally appropriate education. Intentional inclusivity in the classroom, including via diverse books, can

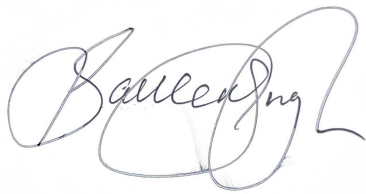


demystify articles of faith and illuminate points of connection and shared history with the broader community. Moreover, any and all efforts to dispel ignorance among students can help to stop bias early, before it metastasizes into the kind of bigotry that drives hate crimes and discrimination in adults.

We further believe that the troubling (and growing) trend of book bans is explicitly linked to politically-motivated attacks on classroom conversations around so-called 'divisive' concepts. This often translates to a chilling effect on what would otherwise be educational meaningful school discussions on systemic discrimination, white supremacy, and other issues affecting faith communities like ours. Advocating for the marginalized, championing equality, and embracing continuous learning are central to the Sikh faith. These principles compel us to support inclusive education and support legislation such as S.220.

The Sikh Coalition fully supports S.220, which will address discrimination and promote inclusivity by allowing there to be equal resources in public libraries and school libraries. We urge the Vermont legislature to pass this legislation, beginning with passage in the House Committee on Government Affairs and Military Operations after this Thursday's hearing. Please don't hesitate to reach out to our organization if we can be a resource for this or other work moving forward.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Savleen Singh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

Savleen Singh
Senior Education Manager
The Sikh Coalition

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harmeet Kaur Kamboj". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'H'.

Harmeet Kaur Kamboj
Senior State Policy Manager
The Sikh Coalition