

# **Akaal Bhutani testimony.SB951.pdf**

Uploaded by: Akaal Bhutani

Position: FAV

March 15, 2022

Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky  
Chair, Senate Committee on Education, Health & Environment  
Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2 West  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB951 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**

Dear Chair Pinsky and Education, Health & Environment Committee Members:

I am providing testimony in support of SB951, which seeks to grant an exception to the National Federation of High School Association's uniform standards. Specifically, this bill will codify into state law the right for secondary school, community colleges and college and university athletes in public institutions to wear clothing or head coverings that are worn for religious reasons, including a hijab, Sikh patka, or long-sleeved bodysuit/legging undergarments for modesty, without requiring prior approval.

By way of background, the Sikh religion, founded in India, is the fifth-largest organized religion in the world, with over 500,000 followers in the United States. While Sikhs have been an integral part of the American fabric for over 125 years, they remain disproportionately targeted in cases of bigotry, bias, bullying, and backlash. Relative to other vulnerable minorities, Sikhs are disproportionately targeted for discrimination because they wear turbans and maintain unshorn hair (including facial hair) in accordance with their faith.

According to a survey by the Sikh Coalition, 67% percent of turbaned Sikh children have experienced bullying, which is more than twice the national average. Students may often wear a patka, a smaller version of a Sikh turban, which is usually worn by boys before they begin wearing a turban. The turban and patka are religious headcovers required by the Sikh faith that cannot be easily removed or reapplied due to their spiritual significance. A turban, patka, and hair should always be treated respectfully, as they are considered articles of faith that are fundamental to Sikh religious practice.

Sikhs, like all other Americans, have the right to wear these articles of faith in school settings, including while playing sports. At both the collegiate and professional level, Sikhs have been allowed to play with their articles of faith. FIFA allows Sikhs to play with turbans, and Sikhs have played competitive basketball with their turbans in the NCAA (Darsh Preet Singh) and NBL Canada (Dipanjot Singh).

I have been an avid student-athlete my whole life, and have played a myriad of sports from basketball to football to soccer and more. For me and for many others, sports are a way to stay healthy, make friends, and be a part of the community. My patka has never impacted my

performance or anyone else's on the field or court. Most of my Sikh friends have also played sports their entire lives.

I'm reminded of an incident where one of my friends was told that his patka violated league rules in a recreation basketball game. He was dumbfounded when he heard this because his patka had never been an issue for him or anyone else on the court. He was unable to play in that game and left feeling heartbroken.

Playing sports and practicing your faith, should not be mutually exclusive. For me, my passion for sports and my Sikh faith are both part of my identity. While the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association did issue a memo granting an exception to the National Federation of High School Association's uniform standards, I support SB951 in codifying religious uniform exceptions into state law so that no one is forced to choose between their passion for sports or practicing their faith.

I respectfully urge your vote in favor of SB951 and thank you for your consideration.

Thank You,  
Akaal Bhutani  
Georgetown Preparatory  
abhutani@gprep.org

# **Ariana Katz testimony.SB951.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ariana Katz

Position: FAV



March 15, 2022

Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky  
Chair, Senate Committee on Education, Health & Environment  
Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2 West  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB951 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**

Dear Chair Pinsky and Education, Health & Environment Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB951 entitled Inclusive Athletic Attire Act.

I've never been much of an athlete, myself. I have, however, been in observant religious life and multi-faith community my entire life. The passage of SB951 will allow all students to participate in sports, regardless of religious observance. It is shocking to me that this is not already law in Maryland, and urge our lawmakers to speedily pass this bill.

Barring students participation in any part of educational or extracurricular life because of religious observance is wrong, and it is dangerous. In a time of increasing Islamophobia, white supremacy, anti-Sikh violence, and anti-Semitism, protections for students of faith to proudly and safely wear their religious garb is tantamount. The stories of Je'Nan Hayes and Maheen Haq, students who were barred from playing on their school basketball teams because they wear hijab is an embarrassment to the values we all hold as Americans.

I am proud to be part of a multifaith coalition of voices in support of this legislation, and I respectfully urge your vote in favor of it. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Ariana Katz  
313 E 29th Street, Baltimore MD 21218  
rabbi@hinenubaltimore.org

# **CFosterHayes\_Testimony SB951 3-15-22.pdf**

Uploaded by: Carlitta Foster-Hayes

Position: FAV

March 15, 2022

Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky  
Chair, Senate Committee on Education, Health & Environment  
Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2 West  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB951 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**

Dear Chair Pinsky and Education, Health & Environment Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB951 entitled Inclusive Athletic Attire Act.

The decision to play basketball came late in my daughters High School years but she was determined to try out for the team. She succeeded and was put on the Varsity team on her first try. I was so proud of the journey she was on; taking a leap to be a part of something that I never felt comfortable doing, playing basketball. She worked hard each game, to do her best and always stayed true to her faith as a young Muslim hijabi woman.

As a parent, it was heartbreaking to sit on the sidelines on March 3, 2017, waiting in anticipation as my daughter was ready to play in her first Regional Finals basketball game, along with her Watkins Mill High School teammates. That anticipation was short-lived rather snatched away due to a technicality that neither of us were aware of. A piece of paper, a written waiver stood in the way of her having the privilege of playing in that game. A referee for that fateful game cited the National Federation of State High School Associations' rule book which states, 'that head decorations and headwear are prohibited' made the decision to ask for such waiver. This waiver documentation should be with the Athletic Director or Coach, at all games, in case the need arises. This waiver would have excused her to play with her sacred hijab, which is like second nature as putting on a shirt or pants when she goes out. The hijab is very distinguishable for a Muslim woman, easy to identify.

As my daughter sat on the bench not one but all four quarters, I became worried about her not playing. That worry turned to annoyance, which turned to frustration, and pivoted to anger. Why? As it turned out, not once during the entire basketball season in Montgomery County, was she informed that she should have requested a waiver, because she was different in one way – her Hijab. The one thing that made her unique, stand-out, and one-of-a-kind – was an issue. Neither the Athletic director nor her coach informed her that such a paper, this waiver, held so much power to exclude her from playing in the Regional finals.

Times are changing, thus should the archaic rules in many sports, organizations and institutions should be revised. One should not be singled out, discriminated against or made to feel left out because of the way they wear their hair, or head covering, or for how they dress.

I truly believe that this SB951 bill is much needed and I fully support your commitment to protect the religious freedom of our vastly different makeup, our wonderful I respectfully urge your vote in favor of it. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carlitta Foster-Hayes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'C'.

Carlitta Foster-Hayes  
9542 Briar Glen Way  
Montgomery Village, MD 20886  
brownlioness@icloud.com



## **SB951\_ JCRC\_fav.pdf**

Uploaded by: Elizabeth Singer

Position: FAV



## **FAVORABLE**

### **Senate Bill 951 - Education – Student Athletes – Uniform Modifications for Modesty (Inclusive Athletic Attire Act)**

**Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs  
Hearing – March 15, 2022**

**Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Howard County  
Betsy Singer and Laura Salganik, Co-chairs**

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of the Jewish Federation of Howard County has worked closely with the Muslim and Indian communities in Howard County over the past several years. We have jointly represented and supported our communities as we advance cooperation and understanding through educational, social, and cultural activities. Many of these have been through and/or related to the Howard County Public School System.

The Jewish Community Relations Council supports a **favorable report from this Committee on SB 951**. This legislation would enable high school and college students participating in sports to wear clothing or head coverings that are worn for religious reasons, including a Muslim hijab; a Sikh dastar or patka; or a Jewish kippah. This legislation would also enable students participating in sports to wear an undershirt or long-sleeved bodysuit/legging undergarments for modesty. These permissible provisions would be in place without requiring a student to obtain prior approval from any school system or college personnel.

Once this legislation is approved a student will no longer have to choose between his or her religious beliefs and practices and participating as a member of a high school or college athletic team. The freedom to make these types of decisions should rest with the student and not be subject to decisions of an individual person at the high school, school system, and/or college level.

This bill does not have any fiscal impact on any school, school system or college. The bill specifically states that the student athlete is responsible for costs associated with any of the modifications.

Therefore, Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County urges a favorable report on SB 951.

# **Jenan Hayes sb951 bill.pdf**

Uploaded by: Je'Nan Hayes

Position: FAV

March 15, 2022

Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky  
Chair, Senate Committee on Education, Health & Environment  
Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2 West  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB951 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**

Dear Chair Pinsky and Education, Health & Environment Committee Members:

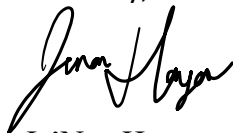
I feel a great sense of honor to be an outlet for change and testify support of bill SB951. Thank you to the respected persons who have introduced this legislation in response to my personal experience and the countless untold stories of people who have faced unfairness in the light of sports. Looking back at the trials I encountered while being on the varsity basketball team at Watkins Mill High school, the first of many challenges began because I wore long-sleeve shirts under my jersey. The referees withheld me from playing due to my undershirt not modifying the official basketball uniform. As a woman, who is Muslim and observes the hijab, conforming my modesty to fit into archaic rulings is something that is not up for negotiation. On many occasions, I observed that some referees granted other players, especially boys who played basketball, to wear opposite color undershirts and allowed clearance to participate in the sport. I would watch from the sidelines and often feel discriminated against. Why did other basketball players get a pass for doing the same thing I do every day to uphold the values of my religious beliefs?

In my 11 years of wearing hijab, I have been called a Thesaurus of nicknames and a receiver of offensive jokes, but never considered the potential to experience a ruling from a sport that would make me authenticate my sincerity to my faith. I had previously played in 24 basketballs tournaments at my school during the season, and on March 3, 2017, I was denied to right to play the sport I had worked countless hours on. My team had lost the regional final against Oxon Hill High School. After losing, my coach Donita Adams pulled me aside and explained my denial for playing time was the absence of official documentation explaining my reason for hijab. Here is the reason, I am Muslim. Wearing a hijab is a part of my uniform that God and God alone can rule on. I should not be a target for simply practicing what I believe is per my faith. A need for documentation about wearing a hijab in a sport was never brought to my attention when I tried out for the team- and it certainly was never discussed with me by the referee before the regional final. Nonetheless, I am somewhat grateful to the Oxon Hill referee who chose to enforce that archaic ruling on that day. Because of rejection, I have gained many opportunities to tell my story, impact change, and increase community support.

By sharing my story, I am here today speaking my truth and refusing to lay down in the face of injustice. I am here today because I refuse to hear another story of a Muslim and other religious party who observe head coverings denied the right to play a sport they love. Thank you for

allowing me the privilege of this written testimony; thank you for this opportunity to testify. I respectfully urge your vote in favor of bill SB951.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Je'Nan Hayes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Je'Nan" and the last name "Hayes" clearly distinguishable.

Je'Nan Hayes  
9542 Briar Glen Way  
Montgomery Village, MD 20886  
Officialjenanhayes@gmail.com

# **WDC Testimony SB0951-2022\_FINAL.pdf**

Uploaded by: JoAnne Koravos

Position: FAV



# MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

[www.womensdemocraticclub.org](http://www.womensdemocraticclub.org)

## **Senate Bill 0951 – Education – Student Athletes – Uniform Modifications for Modesty (Inclusive Athletic Attire Act) Senate Rules Committee – March 15, 2022 SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2022 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic Clubs in our County with hundreds of politically active women and men, including many elected officials.

**WDC urges the passage of SB0951.** This bill will direct boards of education and other governing bodies to allow student athletes to modify an athletic or team uniform to conform to the requirements or preferences of the student athlete's religion or culture. This legislation aligns with Montgomery County<sup>1</sup> and the State Legislature's<sup>2</sup> recent efforts to strive to achieve racial equity and social justice in policy.

WDC typically justifies legislative proposals based on the percentage of residents impacted. However, racial and religious equity for students is not about demographics, but an issue of human rights. President Joseph Biden stated, "We must...work to ensure that no one feels afraid to attend a religious service, school, or community center, or walk down the street wearing the symbols of their faith... Religious freedom is enshrined in our Constitution's First Amendment as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it is both a core American value and a human right."<sup>3</sup>

Other states have adopted policies to accommodate student's athletes' uniform choices. "We are trying to create an inclusive environment," said Ms. Crystal Vital-Schwartz and Mr. Jake Henderson of the CHPS [Columbia Height's Public School, Minnesota] Activities Department. "We don't want uniforms to be the reason for someone not to participate." The Illinois legislature passed the *Inclusive Athletic Attire Act*<sup>4</sup>, which would help to assure and provide Muslim student-athletes with more modest uniform options. There is also a trend towards culturally sensitive sports apparel not only by major commercial brands but in organized sports leagues as well. International athletic brands have recently started clothing and equipment lines that are more modest. The NCAA Volleyball teams allow their players to wear leggings instead of shorts

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<sup>1</sup> Creating a Racial Equity & Social Justice Policy, Montgomery County Council Legislative Branch, <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/EquityMatters.html>

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, Hannah (Feb. 1, 2021). Jones and Ferguson to Require Racial Impact Statements in Bill Analyses, Maryland Matters <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2021/02/01/jones-and-ferguson-to-require-racial-impact-statements-in-bill-analyses/>

<sup>3</sup> 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom, Office of International Religious Freedom, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.womensrunning.com/culture/news/high-school-uniform-policy-changes/>



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND  
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

[www.womensdemocraticclub.org](http://www.womensdemocraticclub.org)

and softball players in Ontario Canada are given long-sleeve undershirts to wear with their typically short-sleeve uniforms.

If even one young athlete is uncomfortable participating on a sports team because the uniform is insensitive to their religious norms, or to their personal comfort or modesty, the school should be prepared to accommodate that student. This bill is an opportunity to push diversity, equity, and inclusion priorities into practice, starting with cultural diversity in our schools.

**We ask for your support for SB0951 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.**

Respectfully,

Leslie Milano  
President



# **MD SB951 - SikhCo Letter of Support.pdf**

Uploaded by: Nikki Singh

Position: FAV

March 15, 2022

Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky  
Chair, Senate Committee on Education, Health & Environment  
Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2 West  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB951 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**

Dear Chair Pinsky and Education, Health & Environment Committee Members,

The Sikh Coalition, the largest Sikh civil rights organization in the nation, is pleased to support [SB951](#), which seeks to grant an exception to the National Federation of High School Association's uniform standards. Specifically, this bill will codify into state law the right for secondary school, community colleges, and college and university athletes in public institutions to wear clothing or head coverings that are worn for religious reasons, including a hijab, Sikh patka, or long-sleeved bodysuit/legging undergarments for modesty, without requiring prior approval.

By way of background, the Sikh religion, founded in India, is the fifth-largest organized religion in the world, with over 500,000 followers in the United States. While Sikhs have been an integral part of the American fabric for over 125 years, they remain disproportionately targeted in cases of bigotry, bias, bullying, and backlash. Relative to other vulnerable minorities, Sikhs are disproportionately targeted for discrimination because they wear turbans and maintain unshorn hair (including facial hair) in accordance with their faith. According to a survey by the Sikh Coalition, 67% percent of turbaned Sikh children have experienced bullying, which is more than twice the national average.

Students may often wear a patka, a smaller version of a Sikh turban, which is usually worn by boys before they begin wearing a turban. The turban and patka are religious headcovers required by the Sikh faith that cannot be easily removed or reapplied due to their spiritual significance. A turban, patka, and hair should always be treated respectfully, as they are considered articles of faith that are fundamental to Sikh religious practice. Sikhs, like all other Americans, have the right to wear these articles of faith in school settings, including while playing sports. At both the collegiate and professional level, Sikhs have been allowed to play with their articles of faith. FIFA allows Sikhs to play with turbans, and Sikhs have played competitive basketball with their turbans in the NCAA (Darsh Preet Singh) and NBL Canada (Dipanjot Singh).



While the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association did issue a memo granting an exception to the National Federation of High School Association's uniform standards, we support SB951 in codifying religious uniform exceptions into state law. We respectfully urge your vote in favor of SB951 and thank you for your consideration. For more information about the Sikh Coalition's support of SB951, please contact Nikki Singh, Senior Manager of Policy and Advocacy at the Sikh Coalition, at [advocacy@sikhcoalition.org](mailto:advocacy@sikhcoalition.org).

Respectfully,



Nikki Singh | ਨਿੱਕੀ ਸਿੰਘ

Senior Manager of Policy and Advocacy | [Sikh Coalition](https://www.sikhcoalition.org)  
[nikki@sikhcoalition.org](mailto:nikki@sikhcoalition.org)  
(732) 924-5945

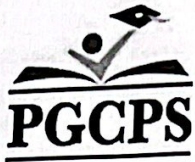
[www.sikhcoalition.org](https://www.sikhcoalition.org)



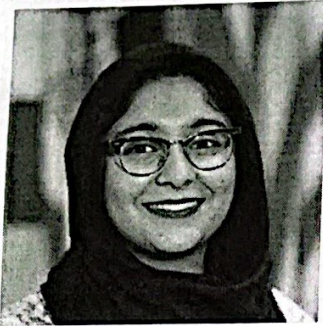
## **Raaheela Ahmed.pdf**

Uploaded by: Raaheela Ahmed

Position: FAV



**Prince George's County Board of Education**  
14201 School Lane • Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20772 • [www.pgcps.org](http://www.pgcps.org)



**Raaheela Ahmed**  
Board Member, District 5  
[raaheela.ahmed@pgcps.org](mailto:raaheela.ahmed@pgcps.org)

**Schools:**

Annapolis Road Academy  
Alternative High @ Tall Oaks  
Benjamin Tasker Middle  
Bowie High  
C. Elizabeth Rieg Regional  
Chapel Forge Early Childhood Center  
Heather Hills Elementary  
High Bridge Elementary  
Imagine Foundations at Leeland Public Charter School  
Kenilworth Elementary  
Kingsford Elementary  
Northview Elementary  
Patuxent Elementary  
Pointer Ridge Elementary  
Rockledge Elementary  
Samuel Ogle Middle  
Tall Oaks High  
Tulip Grove Elementary  
Whitehall Elementary  
Woodmore Elementary  
Yorktown Elementary

~~February 17, 2022~~ March 15, 2022

Honorable ~~Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary~~ Senator *Paul Pinsky*  
Chair, ~~House Ways and Means Committee~~ *Sen. Cmte. on EHE*  
~~House Office Building, Room 131~~ *Miller Senate Ofc. Bldg. 2W*  
Annapolis, MD 21401

*SB 951*  
**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of ~~HB 515~~ Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**

*Pinsky* *EHE*  
Dear Chair ~~Vanessa Atterbeary~~ and Honorable ~~House Ways and Means~~  
Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of ~~HB 515~~ *SB 951* **Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**. As a current member of the Prince George's County Board of Education, I know the importance of providing an educational system where every student can succeed. I understand that to safeguard equity and inclusiveness we must evolve. I am honored to support legislation that I personally know from my own experience will provide another tool to ensure fairness. I was the person who played sports and wore a hijab. I am a proud former student-athlete who played rugby for three years while wearing my hijab.

Playing organized sports builds character, social and leadership skills that transfer into the classroom and society. We do not need barriers that may keep young women from being able to participate in sports. ~~HB 515~~ *SB 951* will allow Muslim women and others who wear particular clothing for religious reasons to participate in athletics. We must continue to protect their right to religious freedom. Our scholars should not have to choose between religious beliefs and athletics.

*SB 951*  
**Please join me in supporting ~~HB 515~~ and I ask for your favorable report.**

Sincerely,

The Honorable Raaheela Ahmed  
Board Member, District 5

**MISSION STATEMENT**

*To provide a great education that empowers all students and contributes to thriving communities.*

**Prince George's County Public Schools**

# **Sarabjheet testimony.SB951.pdf**

Uploaded by: Sarabjeet Bhutani

Position: FAV



March 15, 2022

Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky  
Chair, Senate Committee on Education, Health & Environment  
Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2 West  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB951 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**

Dear Chair Pinsky and Education, Health & Environment Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in support of SB951 entitled Inclusive Athletic Attire Act. My name is Sarabjeet Saluja Bhutani. I am a resident of Rockville, Maryland. I am a School Counselor with Montgomery County Public Schools. I am a practicing Sikh and the proud mother of a student-athlete.

My son and my husband both wear the Sikh article of faith, a turban. My husband, Kawaljit Bhutani, grew up in Baltimore in the 80's. He was the only turban-wearing Sikh at his school. Kawaljit attributes being an athlete to his experience of fitting in and not being regarded as simply 'the smart guy with the blue turban'. He says that sports broke down social barriers. Sports were (and continues to be) the great equalizer. Kawaljit was seen as the guy who could dunk. Sports were his gateway to friendship, belonging and a strong self-esteem that would set the tone for a successful adulthood.

Fast forward to today, my son Akaal has stayed mentally and physically strong because of his involvement in football, basketball and tennis. Knowing and playing sports is social currency for youth. In this day and age when bullying against faith minority youth is so prevalent, sports can and does unite. Our children should not have to choose between their article of faith or engaging in sports participation. Everybody should be able to embrace their faith while staying active and enjoying sports with their peers.

Bullying impacts mental health and leads to isolation, self injurious behaviors and even suicide. There is a growing epidemic of bullying and discrimination against Sikh and Muslim students. Half of Sikh kids experience bullying and harassment in schools, according to the Sikh Coalition. Sports serve as a beneficial outlet to off-set the stresses that adolescents are dealing with. The world is full of discrimination. It should not be when we speak of youth sports. There is no physical advantage to an athlete playing with a turban or hijab while on the court or field. Policies that prohibit wearing articles of faith while competing are outdated and discriminatory. All athletes should be able to practice their faith fearlessly.

My son Akaal has played and managed sports throughout highschool. He will be studying Sports Administration at University of Miami. Sports have been the center of his life, as is the case for many youth. I know that any parent reading this can understand the impact that sports can have on a child's self-esteem, leadership and wellness. In the name of inclusivity and unity, I am certain that the State of Maryland can combat discrimination for our faith-minority student-athletes.

I respectfully urge your vote in favor of SB951 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarabjeet Saluja Bhutani  
9501 Mary Knoll Dr.,  
Rockville, Maryland 20850  
bhutanifamily@gmail.com



# **SB951 FAV BJC - Athletes Uniforms.pdf**

Uploaded by: Sarah Miicke

Position: FAV

## OFFICERS

RABBI ANDREW BUSCH  
President

ELIZABETH GREEN  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice President

THE HON. CHAYA FRIEDMAN

BENJAMIN ROSENBERG

RABBI STEVEN SCHWARTZ

MELANIE SHAPIRO

ROBIN WEIMAN

YEHUDA NEUBERGER  
Past President

HOWARD LIBIT  
Executive Director



## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

### Senate Bill 951 – Education – Students Athletes – Uniforms and Modifications for Modesty (Inclusive Athletic Attire Act)

Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee- March 15, 2022

## SUPPORT

### MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Adat Chaim Congregation  
American Jewish Committee  
Americans for Peace Now  
Baltimore Chapter  
American Israel Public Affairs Committee  
American Red Magen David for Israel  
American Zionist Movement  
Amit Women  
Association of Reform Zionists of America  
Baltimore Board of Rabbis  
Baltimore Hebrew Congregation  
Baltimore Jewish Green and Just Alliance  
Baltimore Men's ORT  
Baltimore Zionist District  
Beth Am Congregation  
Beth El Congregation  
Beth Israel Congregation  
Beth Shalom Congregation of  
Howard County  
Beth Tfiloh Congregation  
B'nai B'rith, Chesapeake Bay Region  
B'nai Israel Congregation  
B'nai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation  
Bolton Street Synagogue  
Chevra Ahavas Chesed, Inc.  
Chevrei Tzedek Congregation  
Chizuk Amuno Congregation  
Congregation Beit Tikvah  
Congregation Beth Shalom of  
Carroll County  
Congregation Tiferes Yisroel  
Federation of Jewish Women's  
Organizations of Maryland  
Hadassah  
Har Sinai - Oheb Shalom Congregation  
J Street  
Jewish Federation of Howard County  
Jewish Labor Committee  
Jewish War Veterans  
Jewish War Veterans, Ladies Auxiliary  
Jewish Women International  
Jews For Judaism  
Moses Montefiore Anshe Emenah  
Hebrew Congregation  
National Council of Jewish Women  
Ner Tamid Congregation  
Rabbinical Council of America  
Religious Zionists of America  
Shaarei Tfiloh Congregation  
Shomrei Emenah Congregation  
Simon E. Sobeloff Jewish Law Society  
Suburban Orthodox Congregation  
Temple Beth Shalom  
Temple Isaiah  
Zionist Organization of America  
Baltimore District

**Background:** Senate Bill 951, (SB951) would require county boards of education, the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association, governing bodies of public secondary schools, public institutions of higher education and community colleges to allow student athletes to modify their team uniform so that it may comply with the requirements or preferences of their religion or culture without pre-approval.

**Written Comments:** The state of Maryland was founded as a home for religious freedom. Today student athletes can be denied the right to play the sports they love because of their religion. No student should be denied the right to participate in school athletics because of what they wear or what religion they practice. For many student athletes, sports are the highlight of their high school or collegiate career, and for some it leads to scholarships and opportunities they would never have otherwise. Athletics should be a place of inclusion where anyone is allowed to participate, and the focus is on skill and competition. However, when students must obtain waivers for uniform modifications, or are forced to sit out altogether, they are unfairly disadvantaged. In many cases, girls are the ones that disproportionately face this hardship and embarrassment.

The Baltimore Jewish Council represents the Jewish community of the broader Baltimore area. Many of the religions commonly practiced in Maryland, including Judaism, call on followers to wear certain attire. This can include head coverings, long sleeves and/or skirts. Reasonable accommodations for religious practices already exist in countless other aspects of life and society, student athletics should not be any different.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of SB951.

*The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.*

BALTIMORE JEWISH COUNCIL

5750 Park Heights Avenue, Suite 329 • Baltimore, Maryland 21215  
410-542-4850 • fax 410-542-4834 • baltjc.org

Member of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Baltimore Jewish Council is an agency of The Associated

**100** The Associated  
Jewish Federation of Baltimore

# **SB0951-253225-01.pdf**

Uploaded by: Shelly Hettleman

Position: FAV



**SB0951/253225/1**

AMENDMENTS  
PREPARED  
BY THE  
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE  
SERVICES

14 MAR 22  
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BY: Senator Hettleman  
(To be offered in the Education, Health, and Environmental  
Affairs Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 951

(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, in line 8, after “culture” insert “or the student athlete’s own preferences for modesty”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 2 in line 2 and on page 4 in line 25, in each instance, strike the second “**THE**” and substitute “**;**”

**(I)    THE**”.

On page 2 in line 4, on page 3 in line 14, and on page 4 in line 27, in each instance, after “**CULTURE**” insert “**;** OR

**(II)    THE STUDENT ATHLETE’S OWN PREFERENCES FOR MODESTY**”.

On page 3, in line 13, strike “**THE**” and substitute “**;**”

**(I)    THE**”.

# **SB951\_Hettleman\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Shelly Hettleman

Position: FAV



*The Senate of Maryland*  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SHELLY HETTLEMAN

SB 951 – Inclusive Athletic Attire Act

This bill seeks to codify the right of our student athletes to modify their athletic uniforms to comply with requirements or preferences that align with their religious or cultural practices. Students should never have to choose between their faith and participating in sports. An athlete who wishes to honor their faith tradition by wearing a turban, a hijab, or by wearing long sleeves under a jersey should not be penalized, ostracized or otherwise excluded from participating.

SB951 will codify into State law the right for secondary school, community college, and college and university athletes in public institutions to wear clothing or head coverings that are worn for religious reasons, including a including a hijab, Sikh turban, or long undergarments for modesty, without requiring any prior approval.

As you will hear from our panelists and written testimony, creating these barriers can cause a student athlete to feel demoralized or stigmatized and has even resulted in players being completely barred from participating.

Unfortunately, many of the students who were able to testify in the House could not take time off of school to be with us today, but I would like to point you to the written testimony of a Montgomery County high school student named Je’Nan Hayes who was benched during a basketball game in 2017 because she lacked “documented evidence” that she was required to wear her hijab for religious reasons. The Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association issued a memo that granted an exception to the National Federation of High School Association’s uniform standards. The memo states that *“Any participant may wear a head covering, wrap, or other required religious garment which is not abrasive, hard, or dangerous to any player/others, and is attached in such a way that it is unlikely to come off during play.”*

We are concerned that if your rights can be granted in a memo, they can be taken away. Memos can be subject to change depending on fluid factors, such as who is in leadership. We don’t want these rights subject to political wind shifts. This bill, modeled after 2017 legislation from Illinois, creates an extra layer of security to protect the civil rights of religious minorities.

In recognizing the vital role that athletics plays in building skills in leadership and fostering a sense of teamwork and community we should be supporting young people’s desire to play, not isolating them because of their beliefs. According to 2020 Census data, Maryland’s demographic makeup is considered to be the most racially and

ethnically diverse on the East Coast. As such, it is in our best interest to ensure that ALL our students have opportunities, not obstacles, to get in the game.

No student athlete should ever have to choose between their religious beliefs and the sports they love. For these reasons, I ask for your support of SB951. Thank you.

<sup>1</sup>United States Census Bureau., (2020) “Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the United States: 2010 Census and 2020 Census”. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/racial-and-ethnic-diversity-in-the-united-states-2010-and-2020-census.html>





## **Maryland Hearing - SJS .pdf**

Uploaded by: Simran Singh

Position: FAV

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**Simran Jeet Singh**  
Executive Director

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My brothers and I loved sports growing up, and as kids, we dreamed of playing professional soccer and basketball. We played club and recreational, and we played for our middle school basketball teams.

Imagine our surprise when our oldest brother, Harpreet, went to try out for the high school basketball team and was told that the state rules didn't allow him to play with his turban. Rather than playing the sport he loved and deserved to play, my brother spent his entire freshman season petitioning the state governing body to change their rules to allow him to play.

Soccer was my primary love, and I had encounters with religious discrimination too. After multiple incidents where referees and opposing coaches insisted I couldn't play while wearing a turban, I began petitioning the United States Soccer Federation to change its rules to allow religious minorities to play while maintaining their religious garb. I remember thinking how unfair it was to be asked to choose between two things I cherished most: my love for my faith and my love for sports. I also remember wondering how this could be legal. Hadn't we learned in school that religious freedom was one of our country's founding principles?

By this point we had learned an important lesson. It wasn't enough to seek an exception to a rule that discriminated against us. We needed to ensure better rules that accounted for everyone in our communities. With my parent's guidance, we helped create a rule change that didn't just give me the right to play soccer, or even just allow Sikhs to play with their turbans. My parents were clear that this rule had to explicitly account for everyone, including Jews who wear kippahs and Muslims who wear hijabs.

A few years later, my younger brother Darsh blossomed into a high school basketball star and became the first turbaned basketball player in NCAA history. His jersey hung in the Smithsonian, inspiring young people of all backgrounds that they can all overcome the barriers that obstruct them.

But this also raises an interesting question for us. What if we learned from our experiences of hardship and helped remove some of the inequitable barriers that our children face? What if we recognized that some rules are unnecessarily exclusive and put people we care about in the same tough positions my brothers and I face growing up, of having to make a false choice between our love for faith and love for sports?

The next step to me is clear. It's time we begin to updating our policies to account for the diverse communities that make up America – and that includes religious communities too. I look forward to seeing this change in our society with the passage of SB951, and I'm grateful to the state of Maryland for setting the example of what our country can and should be.

Simran Jeet Singh, PhD  
Executive Director  
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[aspn.org/religionandsociety](https://aspn.org/religionandsociety)

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# **SB951\_FAV\_ACLUMD.pdf**

Uploaded by: Yanet Amanuel

Position: FAV



## **Testimony for Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee**

**March 15, 2022**

### **SB 951– Education - Student Athletes - Uniform Modifications for Modesty (Inclusive Athletic Attire Act)**

**FAVORABLE**

YANET AMANUEL  
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The ACLU of Maryland supports SB 951, which would allow student athletes to modify an athletic or team uniform to make the attire more modest to conform to the requirements or preferences of the student athlete's religion or culture. The ACLU vigorously defends the rights of all Americans, including public school students, to practice their religion and express their faith.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” As enshrined in the First Amendment, religious freedom includes two complementary protections: the right to religious belief and expression and a guarantee that the government neither prefers religion over non-religion nor favors particular faiths over others. These dual protections work hand in hand, allowing religious liberty to thrive and safeguarding both religion and government from the undue influences of the other.

This bill codifies into state law the right for secondary school, community colleges and college and university athletes in public institutions to wear clothing or head coverings that are worn for religious reasons, including, but not limited to a hijab, Sikh patka, or long-sleeved bodysuit/legging undergarments for modesty, without requiring prior approval.

Currently, the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association issued a memo granting an exception to the National Federation of High

School Association's uniform standards, but no protection exists at the state level to protect religious minorities rights. The bill upholds the constitutionally protected right to religious freedom for athletes of diverse faiths, races, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report for SB 951.



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# **Yasmeen Elkoshairi testimony.SB951.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Yasmeen Elkoshairi

Position: FAV



March 15, 2022

Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky  
Chair, Senate Committee on Education, Health & Environment  
Miller Senate Office Building, Room 2 West  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB951 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**

Dear Chair Pinsky and Education, Health & Environment Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB951 entitled Inclusive Athletic Attire Act.

My name is Yasmeen Elkoshairi. Ever since I was a young girl, playing sports has been one of my biggest passions. The excitement of winning games, celebrating with teammates, and being part of something bigger than yourself is not an experience that is replaceable by anything else. Sports are a big part of a person's upbringing and teach many irreplaceable lessons. The fact that these experiences could be denied to a child because of their religious choices is beyond unfair and disgusting. I am a hijabi myself as you can see, and I have played soccer for years. I've played club soccer, varsity soccer, academy soccer, and am now in the process of playing for a semi-professional team. And in all my years of playing, I have never had a problem with uniforming due to the fact that there is no inconvenience as long as the colors match. Covering up and wearing a headscarf is a difficult decision, so the fact that this decision could become a sort of punishment is demeaning and shows no empathy for the struggles hijabis already have to go through. I believe that if there is no conflict with the colors in the uniform, there should be no restrictions on what an athlete has to wear. We are too advanced of a society to disallow children to play because of their clothing and religious choices.

I respectfully urge your vote in favor of it. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Yasmeen Elkoshairi  
15830 Comus rd. 20871 clarksburg MD  
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# **Zainab Chaudry testimony.SB951.pdf**

Uploaded by: Zainab Chaudry

Position: FAV



March 15, 2022

Honorable Senator Paul Pinsky  
Chair, Senate Committee on Education, Health & Environment  
Senate Miller Office Building, 2 West  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB951 Inclusive Athletic Attire Act**

Dear Chair Pinsky and Education, Health & Environment Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of SB951 entitled Inclusive Athletic Attire Act introduced by Senator Shelly Hettleman. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

In my time working as a social justice activist, I have personally spoken with many families of students across the state who either 1) faced obstacles in competing in school sports because they wear a religious headscarf and dress modestly, or 2) have chosen not to pursue their passion for sports out of fear that they would be singled out and humiliated because of their religious beliefs. Some of this fear unfortunately is rooted in the experiences of other Maryland student athletes including Je'Nan Hayes and Maheen Haq who are among the witnesses here today in support of this legislation.

Playing competitive sports is challenging without having to worry about uniform policies that risk compromising religious practices or values. But when regulations make it difficult to practice these beliefs, it creates a frustrating stalemate that no amount of skill or practice alone can resolve. This is the dilemma that athletes around the world have faced, including American athletes Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir and Darsh Preet Singh.

Abdul-Qaadir made history in 2010 as the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) first female Muslim basketball player who wears an Islamic headscarf. Singh made history in 2004 as the NCAA's first Sikh basketball player to wear a turban in collegiate competitions. His jersey now hangs in the Smithsonian Museum.

But neither of these players had the option to continue their basketball careers beyond college. That's because, up until 2017, International Basketball Federation (FIBA), the overarching association of national organizations governing international basketball competition, had a policy banning any headgear—including religious garments—wider than 5 centimeters. This provision automatically disqualified Sikh and Muslim athletes who respectively wear turbans and hijabs as mandated by their faith.

Fortunately, over the last five years, there's been significant progress on the state, national and international level to make sports more inclusive for athletes of all religious backgrounds.

In 2017, after a massive interfaith public campaign, my organization welcomed FIBA's official ruling lifting its ban on religious headgear to allow players who wear articles of faith to participate in international competitions.<sup>1</sup> Also in 2017, we applauded the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA)'s policy change – prompted by Je'Nan's case – allowing student athletes to wear articles of faith including hijab.<sup>2</sup>

In a March 21, 2017 memo to local supervisors of athletics and member school athletic directors, MPSSAA stated in part:

*"The Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA) herein grants an exception to the NFHS uniform standards for religious purposes. Any participant may wear a head covering, wrap, or other required religious garment which is not abrasive, hard, or dangerous to any player/others, and is attached in such a way that it is unlikely to come off during play."*

In 2021, my organization welcomed the National Federation of State High School Associations' (NFHS) decision to permit religious headscarves and other religious headgear for volleyball players.<sup>3</sup> SB951 is important because it takes the 2017 MPSSAA policy memo granting religious exceptions in Maryland and codifies it into law.

The bill builds on similar legislation enacted in other states including Illinois and Tennessee to create an extra layer of security to protect civil rights. It mandates that any uniform modifications for religious purposes should not pose a safety hazard. Many well-known retailers including Under Armour and Nike now manufacture sports hijabs and modest athletic attire that are widely endorsed by national and international athletes.

Religion should never be a factor in determining whether anyone is qualified or capable of competing in any sport. This historic bill will defend the constitutionally protected right to religious freedom, especially in these politically tumultuous times, and encourage student athletes of all backgrounds to pursue their passion for sports knowing that their state is committed to inclusivity and diversity both on and off the playing field.

We respectfully urge a favorable report on SB951.

Sincerely,

Zainab Chaudry, Pharm.D.  
Director, CAIR Office in Maryland  
Council on American-Islamic Relations  
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## References:

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