

February 26, 2024

100 State Cir,
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB1363 Asian American History Curriculum Requirement (SUPPORT)

Dear Delegate Valderrama and Delegate Wu,

The Sikh Coalition is pleased to support [HB1363](#), which will require the Maryland State Board of Education to develop curriculum content standards for a unit of instruction on Asian American history in public schools in the state.

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.

Sikhism is the world's fifth largest religion, with more than 30 million followers around the world and somewhere between 750 thousand and one million in the United States. As a community that has proudly been a part of the fabric of America for more than 125 years, our contributions to the state of Maryland are rich and deep. Today, in nearly every facet of Maryland's society and economy, Sikhs are making a profound impact; the state is home to a robust and growing Sikh population, with more than four gurdwaras (Sikh houses of worship).

However, Sikhs remain disproportionately targeted in cases of bigotry, bias, bullying and backlash. Specifically, Sikhs are often targeted for discrimination because many maintain articles of faith, including turbans and unshorn hair, in accordance with our faith. According to the [FBI's most recent data](#), Sikhs were the second-most targeted faith group for hate crimes and bias incidents across the country in 2022. Such bigotry also unfortunately manifests in our schools, as 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 can demystify articles of faith and illuminate points of connection and shared history with the broader community. Because Sikhism originated in the Punjab region of South Asia, a vast majority of Sikhs have South Asian heritage; unfortunately, our stories, alongside the stories of other Asian American groups, have historically been excluded from public schools. For this reason, the Sikh Coalition proudly supports HB1363 as a means to help Asian American children feel safe and seen in Maryland classrooms as well as to ensure a more complete education for all of Maryland's students. We urge the Maryland legislature to pass this bill.

Respectfully,



Savleen Singh
Sikh Coalition
Senior Education Manager



Harmeet Kaur Kamboj
Sikh Coalition
Senior State Policy Manager