



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 83

Resolution calling upon the Mayor's office and New York City Department of Education to recognize and observe the important Sikh holiday, Vaisakhi, on April 13 each year.

By Council Members Gennaro, Lee, Joseph, Hanif, Ung, Won, Dinowitz, Cabán, Farías, Stevens, Abreu, Ossé, Williams, De La Rosa, Krishnan, Hudson, Gutiérrez, Schulman, Avilés, Rivera, Nurse, Bottcher, Riley, Yeger, Sanchez, Louis, Carr and Vernikov

Whereas, Sikhism is a religion and philosophy founded in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent in the late 15th century; and

Whereas, There are an estimated 25-30 million adherents of Sikhism, called Sikhs, worldwide according to various sources, including the Encyclopedia Britannica and BBC News, making it the world's fifth-largest organized religion; and

Whereas, Sikhs first came to the United States in the late 1800s according to the Sikh Coalition, a national organization based in New York City; and

Whereas, The U.S. Census Bureau does not collect data on religious affiliation, so there is no official U.S. government data on the number of Sikhs in this country, but estimates of the number of Sikhs in the U.S. today range from 500,000 to 700,000, according to the Sikh Coalition and the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), a national civil rights and educational organization based in Washington, DC; and

Whereas, Although there is no official count of Sikhs in New York City, the Sikh Coalition estimated the City's Sikh population at approximately 50,000 in 2007, while a representative with United Sikhs, a U.N. affiliated, international non-profit, humanitarian relief, education and advocacy organization headquartered in New York, estimated the number of Sikhs in the City at around 80,000 in 2010, with the largest concentration

of 50,000 to 60,000 in Richmond Hill, Queens alone; and

Whereas, Sikh New Yorkers have contributed to this City for many decades but have received very little recognition of their efforts as a group or of their faith; and

Whereas, For example, unlike holidays of other groups, such as the Christian holiday of Easter, the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr and the East Asian Lunar New Year, the Sikh holiday of Vaisakhi is not widely known or recognized; and

Whereas, According to the British Broadcasting Corporation, Vaisakhi-the Sikh New Year festival, usually celebrated on April 13 or 14-started as a harvest festival in the Punjabi region of northern India and marks the start of the Punjabi New Year; and

Whereas, Vaisakhi is also a day to celebrate 1699-the year when Sikhism was born as a collective faith-and is one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar; and

Whereas, In reality, most New Yorkers and other Americans know little to nothing about Sikhs or Sikhism, and this lack of awareness and understanding has contributed to an increase in bias incidents and hate crimes against Sikhs according to the Sikh Coalition; and

Whereas, According to data compiled by the Sikh Coalition, Sikhs are among the nation's most-targeted religious groups and are hundreds of times more likely than their fellow Americans to experience hate crimes because of their distinct appearance, including the wearing of turbans; and

Whereas, In particular, a wave of hate began in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, with over 300 cases of violence and discrimination against Sikh Americans throughout the U.S. in the first month after 9/11 documented by the Sikh Coalition; and

Whereas, Since then, the Sikh Coalition has received thousands of reports from the Sikh community about hate crimes, workplace discrimination, school bullying, and racial and religious profiling; and

Whereas, More recently, in April 2021, four Sikhs were killed in a mass shooting at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis, as reported by the Associated Press and other media outlets; and

Whereas, Promoting greater awareness and understanding of Sikhs and their religious practices and traditions may help to reduce the number of bias-based incidents and bullying; and

Whereas, New York City has a history of recognizing and celebrating its diverse ethnic communities and the Mayor's office can play a major role in promoting greater awareness and appreciation of Sikhs by designating April 13 to recognize Vaisakhi and celebrate Sikh heritage; and

Whereas, For example, while Sikhs do celebrate Vaisakhi with a parade, it is not widely recognized or televised like the St. Patrick's, Columbus or Puerto Rican Day parades, nor are alternate side of the street parking regulations suspended as is the case for Lunar New Year, Eid al-Fitr, Diwali and most major Christian and Jewish holidays; and

Whereas, Schools can also play an important role in raising awareness and understanding of Sikhs and helping to reduce bias and bullying; and

Whereas, A 2008 report by the Sikh Coalition based on a survey of Sikhs in New York City found that half of the City's Sikh students reported being teased or harassed because of their Sikh identity and, among those who wear turbans or patkas, 3 out of 5 Sikh children had been harassed and verbally or physically abused; and

Whereas, Currently, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) permits students to take an excused absence for religious observances such as Vaisakhi and, similarly, allows employees time off for religious observance, but there is no other acknowledgement of Sikh students or employees; and

Whereas, The DOE is shifting to a new educational strategy called "culturally responsive-sustaining education (CR-SE)" which is a cultural view of learning in which multiple forms of diversity, including nationality and religion, "are recognized, understood, and regarded as indispensable sources of knowledge for rigorous teaching and learning"; and

Whereas, Additionally, the DOE is investing \$202 million in FY22 to develop a rigorous, inclusive, and affirming curriculum by fall 2023 called the Universal Mosaic Curriculum; and

Whereas, It is critically important that the DOE include discussion and awareness of the Sikh culture, traditions and religious observances, especially Vaisakhi, into their CR-SE and Universal Mosaic Curriculum, since it is one of the most historically significant days of the year for Sikhs, and it provides an excellent opportunity for education during the month of April; and

Whereas, Both the Mayor's office and the DOE can play a critical role in raising awareness and understanding of Sikhs and helping to reduce bias, bullying and hate crimes against them; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the Mayor's office and New York City Department of Education to recognize and observe the important Sikh holiday, Vaisakhi, on April 13 each year.

Session 12

AH

LS #6210

03/14/22

Session 11

JA

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