



New York City Comptroller
John C. Liu

NEWS RELEASE

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LIU CALLS ON MAYOR TO REFORM NYPD RELIGIOUS GARB POLICY

NEW YORK, NY – City Comptroller John C. Liu today called on Mayor Bloomberg to reform NYPD policy to allow Sikh officers to serve without having to forsake their turbans and beards.

In a letter, Comptroller Liu commended the Mayor for his words of comfort and support to the City’s Sikh community in the wake of the Wisconsin shootings, saying that now is the time for New York City to make a meaningful change of inclusion to Sikh members of the NYPD.

“The attack in Wisconsin reminds us that intolerance still rears its ugly head today. Sikhs have felt alienation and distress over the past decade since September 11. In the wake of the Wisconsin killings, which have shocked the national conscience, our City can enact meaningful inclusion of this community by changing NYPD rules to allow Sikhs to serve without having to forsake their turbans and beards,” Comptroller Liu wrote.

Comptroller Liu noted that the Washington D.C., Metro Police Department has amended its rules to allow Sikh officers to wear religious garb and pointed to a recent City Council law that requires workplaces to foster supportive environments for religious practices.

Comptroller Liu said that by reforming the NYPD policy, individuals of other faith groups who wear head coverings and grow beards, as required by their religion, would also benefit.

“Shouldn’t the NYPD, providing security in one of the most diverse cities in the world, proudly display its own diversity?” Comptroller Liu said.

Jasminder Kaur, project manager of United Sikhs, said:

“It’s imperative for people to know that Sikhs are woven into the fabric of American society and are not the ‘other.’ One way to promote that is through increasing participation of Sikhs with turbans and beards in government jobs. We appreciate Comptroller Liu for taking the initiative to bring this up with the NYPD and assuring us of his continuous support.”

Harpreet Singh Toor, Chairman of Public and External Affairs for the Sikh Cultural Society, said:

“It is heartening to see that all of America came out to support the Sikh community in this time of tragedy, but as long as the systematic discrimination continues at the city, state, and federal

levels, Sikhs will always feel themselves to be lesser Americans than others. Why, after living in this great country for more than 100 years, do we have to prove every time that we are as much American as anybody else?"

Rabbi David Zwiebel, Executive Vice President of Agudath Israel of America, said:

"As wonderful a job as the NYPD does in carrying out its awesome responsibilities, New York's Finest would be finer still if its membership reflected the full diversity of the beautiful mosaic that is New York City. Policies that have the effect of excluding members of certain faith communities because of their religious garb or grooming should be re-evaluated. I commend Comptroller Liu for raising this important issue."

Comptroller Liu added:

"We must eliminate all religious barriers to joining the NYPD. Religious men from all faiths, whether they are Sikhs or Orthodox Jews, should be able to serve the people of New York City."

FULL TEXT OF COMPTROLLER LIU'S LETTER TO MAYOR BLOOMBERG:

August 10, 2012

The Honorable Michael Bloomberg
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Bloomberg,

Thank you for the words of support and comfort offered to our City's Sikh community in the wake of the horrific shootings in Wisconsin and for increasing NYPD security around our City's gurdwaras.

The attack in Wisconsin reminds us that intolerance still rears its ugly head today. Sikhs have felt alienation and distress over the past decade since September 11. In the wake of the Wisconsin killings, which have shocked the national conscience, our City can enact meaningful inclusion of this community by changing NYPD rules to allow Sikhs to serve without having to forsake their turbans and beards.

These outward signs of religious observance are for Sikhs an article of faith. Sikh community groups have long fought to secure officers the right to wear them while proudly serving our City.

There is precedent for such a move. The Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Police Department recently amended its rules to allow Sikhs to wear religious garb while serving as full-time law enforcement officers.

In our own City, the MTA recently dropped its requirement that Sikh employees affix their turbans with the MTA logo. In 2004, the NYPD reinstated two Sikh traffic enforcement agents,

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allowing them to wear turbans and full beards. And the City Council last year passed a law enhancing religious freedom in the workplace, aimed, among other things, at making it easier for officers to challenge the NYPD's turban/beard ban.

Reforming the NYPD policy on religious garb would also benefit individuals of other faith groups who wear head coverings and grow their beards as required by their religion.

Shouldn't the NYPD, providing security in one of the most diverse cities in the world, proudly display its own diversity?

Sincerely,

John C. Liu

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