

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Senator Thomas Umberg, Chair
2023-2024 Regular Session

SR 27 (Cortese)
Version: June 21, 2023
Hearing Date: July 6, 2023
Fiscal: No
Urgency: No
AWM

SUBJECT

Sikhism

SYNOPSIS

This resolution recognizes the contributions of Sikhs and seeks to afford all residents of this State the opportunity to understand and appreciate the rich history and shared experiences of Sikhs.

This resolution is sponsored by the author and is supported by California Civil Liberties Advocacy. There is no known opposition.

SUMMARY

This resolution:

- 1) Declares that:
 - a) California is home to a diverse population with a rich cultural heritage of various ethnic groups that contribute to the richness and diversity of the state.
 - b) Sikhs, who are a distinct ethnic and religious community that originated in Punjab, India, began immigrating to the United States in the late 1800s and have played an important role in developing this country and the State of California while enriching American culture, history, economy, and diversity.
 - c) In 1912, the first Sikh house of worship (Gurdwara) in the United States, the Stockton Sikh Temple, was founded by Jawala Singh and Wasakha Singh. The following year, the congregation formed the Pacific Coast Diwan Society.
 - d) Sikhism is the fifth-largest religion in the world with more than 25 million Sikhs worldwide, including more than 500,000 in the United States.
 - e) Sikhism places a primary focus on equality and the oneness of humanity and encourages those to practice "seva," meaning self-service, such as providing free food to the less-fortunate in the community, or helping the Gurdwara,

- including cleaning, washing dishes, or serving in the “langar,” meaning the kitchen, where all are welcome to sit and eat together.
- f) Although Sikhs have made immense contributions throughout history, they have long faced oppression and discrimination throughout the world, including the United States, which did not enact legislation authorizing Sikhs and other East Indian immigrants to naturalize as United States citizens until 1946.
 - g) The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner document entitled 18 Commitments on “Faith of Rights” included teaching and scripture from the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji meant to promote interfaith and interreligious harmony, peace, and human rights.
 - h) According to Sikh religion and history, Sikhs share a unique set of beliefs, practices, and ancestry.
 - i) The values of tolerance and religious diversity grounded in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, the state’s promotion of a culture and mutual understanding, and the importance of reducing violence are all consistent with Sikhism.
- 2) Resolves by the Senate:
- a) That the Senate seeks to further the diversity of the state and afford all residents the opportunity to better understand, recognize, and appreciate the rich history and shared experiences of the Sikhs.
 - b) That the Senate recognizes and acknowledges the significant contributions made by Californians of Sikh heritage to our Sate, and by adoption of this resolution, seeks to afford all Californians the opportunity to better understand, recognize, and appreciate the rich history and shared experiences of the Sikhs.
 - c) That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

COMMENTS

1. Author’s comment

According to the author:

Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world with more than 25,000,000 adherents worldwide. 750,000 live in the United States and approximately half of that population reside in California. Sikhism places a primary focus on the oneness of humanity and emphasizes service. Inspired by this creed, Sikhs have greatly contributed to the vibrancy of California yet still remain one of our least recognized religions. SR 27 seeks to rectify this by declaring Sikhs as a distinct ethnic and religious minority. Although Sikhs have made immense contributions throughout history, they have long faced oppression and discrimination

throughout the world. Hate often festers where ignorance reigns. To that end, this resolution will educate Californians about this essential community.

2. This resolution recognizes the unique contributions of Sikhs to the State and the country

Sikhism is a religion founded in the 15th century in South Asia;¹ Sikhs are considered a distinct ethnic group as well as a religious community.² Sikhs began immigrating to the United States over 100 years ago.³ There are between 25 million and 30 million Sikhs worldwide, making it the fifth-largest religion in the world.⁴ Approximately 500,000 Sikhs live in the United States, with a significant Sikh presence in California.⁵

This resolution acknowledges the contributions made by Sikhs in this State and in the Country, highlights the Sikh values of tolerance, diversity, and equality shared by Sikhs, and resolves that all residents should be afforded the opportunity to better understand, recognize, and appreciate the rich history and shared experiences of Sikhs.

SUPPORT

California Civil Liberties Advocacy

OPPOSITION

None known

RELATED LEGISLATION

Pending Legislation: None known.

Prior Legislation: SR 95 (Cortese, 2022) was similar to this resolution. SR 95 was introduced but not heard in 2022.

¹ SikhNet, Who are Siks? What is Sikhism? (2023), <https://www.sikhnet.com/pages/who-are-sikhs-what-is-sikhism>. All links in this analysis are current as of June 30, 2023.

² United States Census Bureau, FAQs: Were Sikhs counted as a distinct detailed group in the 2020 Census?, https://ask.census.gov/prweb/PRServletCustom/app/ECORRAsk2/YACFBFye-rFlz_FoGtyvDRUGg1Uzu5Mn*/!STANDARD?pzuiactionzzz=CXtpbn0rTEpMcGRYOG1vS0tqTFAwaENUZWpvM1NNWEMzZ3p5aFpnWUxzVmw0TjJoMEZlb1Z1N2xLcllmNWtJaVIGS0xZ*#:~:text=Yes%2C%20Sikhs%20were%20counted%20as,outreach%20over%20the%20past%20decade.

³ SikhNet, Who are Siks? What is Sikhism?, *supra*.

⁴ The Sikh Coalition, Sikhi at a Glance (2023), <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/about-sikhs/>; *id.*, Sikhs in America (2023), <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/about-sikhs/sikhs-in-america/>.

⁵ The Sikh Coalition, Sikhi at a Glance, *supra*; SikhiWiki, Sikhism in the USA (2011), https://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Sikhism_in_the_USA.