



Honorable Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Labour
Government of British Columbia
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

April 24, 2025

Dear Minister Whiteside,

Subject: Concerns Regarding Clean-Shaven Policies and Their Impact on Sikh Workers

On behalf of the BC Gurdwaras Council (BCGC), we are writing to express our deep concern regarding the clean-shaven policies mandated by WorkSafeBC through regulation and BC Ferries through policy. These policies and regulations have created a human rights crisis by disproportionately impacting Sikh workers in British Columbia, whose religious beliefs and practices are being compromised. The principle of unshorn hair, or Kesh, is a fundamental tenet of the Sikh faith and Sikhs maintain unshorn hair as an act of acceptance of God's will and living in harmony with nature.

The requirement to be clean-shaven for the purpose of wearing tight-fitting respirators directly conflicts with this religious practice, effectively excluding Sikh workers from certain roles and opportunities when there are readily available alternatives that will not compromise the safety or health of the individual or increase the liability to the employer. This exclusion not only violates their human rights but also undermines the principles of diversity and inclusion that British Columbia strives to uphold.

We acknowledge the importance of workplace safety and the need for effective respiratory protection. However, inclusive solutions can be implemented without compromising safety standards. For instance, alternatives such as the Cam Lock Fast Cowl SCBA (Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus), which is already in use in other jurisdictions, provide a viable option. When there are solutions to an issue that fundamentally restricts advancement of a workers career path and violates their human rights, it is our expectation that those solutions and options are implemented without delay.

We urge WorkSafeBC and BC Ferries to review these regulations and policies considering the principles of human rights and religious freedom. By adopting inclusive safety measures, these organizations can ensure that all workers, regardless of their religious beliefs, have equal access to employment opportunities while maintaining workplace safety.

The current policies are creating a significant barrier for Sikh workers, and it is imperative that changes are made to address this human rights issue without delay. We respectfully request a meeting to discuss this matter further and explore potential solutions. As this issue is now being actively discussed within the Sikh community in British Columbia, our leadership will make all attempts to work with our elected officials and Worksafe BC to ensure a practical, safe, and respectable solution is found. We are confident that, together, we can find a path forward that upholds both safety and inclusivity.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Moninder Singh', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Moninder Singh
Spokesperson

cc: Baltej Singh Dhillon, Chair Worksafe BC Board

BC Gurdwaras Council:

Gurdwara Sahib Dasmesh Darbar (Surrey BC)
Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara (Surrey BC)
Gurdwara Baba Banda Singh Bahadur (Abbotsford BC)
Gurdwara Sahib Kalgidhar Darbar (Abbotsford BC)
Gurdwara Sahib Sukh Sagar (New Westminster BC)
Gurdwara Sahib Khalsa Darbar (Vancouver BC)
Gurdwara Sahib Bhav Sagar Taran (Oliver BC)
Gurdwara Guru Amar Das Sahib (Kelowna BC)
Gurdwara Sahib Penticton Sikh Temple (Penticton BC)
Gurdwara Singh Sabha Sahib (Victoria BC)
Gurdwara Sahib Miri Piri Darbar (Nanaimo BC)
Gurdwara Sahib Guru Nanak Society (Port Alberni BC)