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Sikh Coalition's Policy Principles for Immigration

Please note that this information is not intended as legal advice, and the Sikh Coalition does not provide legal aid for immigration cases. If you are in need of specific and immediate legal assistance, please contact the Sikh Coalition directly for a potential referral at <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/legal-help>.

The Sikh Coalition does not provide legal aid for immigration cases, but we have accumulated a body of knowledge over the past several years related to the underlying dynamics around Sikh immigration and asylum-seeking in the United States as well as the inhumane treatment experienced by Sikhs and members of other communities from officers of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). We have combined that knowledge with the U.S.-based Sikh community's own history—including growth via immigration and naturalization in the United States over more than 130 years—to inform our perspective on policy matters related to immigration, which is one of the most complex and relevant issue areas in the 2025 political landscape.

We endeavor to approach these issues from the perspective that how we treat those who are most vulnerable in our society is not just a matter of laws and policies but a reflection of our values. We also believe that undocumented people, including members of our own community, deserve constitutional rights, due process, and access to basic services. Sikhs who experience hate crimes or whose children experience severe school bullying should be able to report them to the police or their school district, respectively, regardless of their immigration status. Sikhs who live and work in all professions, including truck drivers and farm workers, should be free to earn a living for their families without being profiled or harassed. And Sikhs who come to our country seeking safety, freedom, and opportunity—especially after fleeing religious or political persecution—should be welcomed by a fair judicial system willing to hear their case, regardless of the specific circumstances of their arrival.

This document, including the below 'frequently asked questions' (FAQ) portion, is an effort to articulate the Sikh Coalition's immigration policy positions and answer community questions with regard to the same. As is the case with all of our Policy Principles and FAQ documents, these positions are **not** meant to represent the consensus view of all Sikhs: our community, like any other, is not a monolith, and individual views on immigration are often colored by one's personal position, family experiences, and broader political outlook.

In general, the Sikh Coalition **supports** immigration policies that:

- Protect the tradition of welcoming and nurturing immigrant communities within the United States, including the guarantee of [birthright citizenship](#) under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
- Establish a path to citizenship for individuals who have been integral to their communities in the United States for years, including but not limited to those who came to this country as children.
- Maintain the internationally recognized right to seek asylum, and support the practical exercise of that right by:
 - Providing appropriate logistical support (e.g. language accessible information and the right to an attorney) to people seeking asylum, and
 - Fully funding and resourcing our overtaxed and broken asylum system.
- Impose oversight and accountability mechanisms on all facets of immigration enforcement—particularly given the track record of abuses against individuals and communities (including Sikhs) in ICE and CBP custody.
- Take thoughtful and innovative steps at the state and city levels to better protect the constitutional rights of and ensure due process for all people, regardless of their immigration status
- Maintain or increase government-funded support services for recent immigrants.

In general, the Sikh Coalition **opposes** immigration policies that:

- Attempt to denaturalize or otherwise strip U.S. citizens who immigrated to this country of their legal status or rights.
- Close off existing paths to legal immigration status that have been shown to be beneficial to members of our and other communities.
- Ban immigration or entry into the United States for specific groups on the basis of religion, national origin, or other such characteristics, or promote the deportation or extradition of individuals from the United States on the basis of their (actual or perceived) lawful political views.
- Expand the reach of immigration enforcement and deportation in such a way that
 - Employ immigration raids, which have a documented history of causing both civil rights violations and physical injuries, as a strategy;
 - “Protected areas,” which have traditionally been exempt from immigration enforcement per previous ICE policy, are no longer treated as such;
 - Profiling is more likely to be used against Black and brown individuals and communities and/or individuals and communities perceived as “other” (including the Sikh community);
 - Strips immigrants, regardless of their legal status, of due process or their constitutional rights; and/or
 - More and larger ICE facilities and/or tent cities are required.
- Cause the separation of families, which we believe to be a fundamentally inhumane practice.
- Deport or otherwise send detained individuals in U.S. custody or living on U.S. soil to unsafe environments, through means such as
 - Deportation of DACA recipients, “DREAMers,” or others who have lived their lives in the United States to countries that they have no practical experience living in;
 - The rescission of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for communities of people who are here legally after escaping countries that continue to be dangerous;

- Third-country deportation; and/or
- Changes to rules for asylum seekers that would put them in dangerous environments (e.g. the 'remain in Mexico' policy) as they await movement through the U.S. legal system.

Sikh Coalition's Immigration Policy Positions: Frequently Asked Questions

The Sikh Coalition values community questions and engagement on all of our advocacy work. In our effort to provide clarity and transparency, we want to directly answer some of the most frequently asked questions regarding our work and positions involving immigration policy.

The Sikh Coalition's Work on Immigration

Does the Sikh Coalition do immigration casework? No. The Sikh Coalition does not provide direct legal services for individual Sikhs seeking legal status (including asylum) in the United States, because it is critical that individuals are represented by immigration attorneys with that expertise. However, we have gathered resources that may be helpful to community members, and we have a referral list of Punjabi-speaking immigration attorneys who work on asylum cases for those who need these types of legal resources.

Does the Sikh Coalition provide direct aid on individual Sikh detention cases? No, the Sikh Coalition does not singularly provide direct legal services for Sikhs once they are inside the U.S. detention system. However, we will work with other immigration and civil rights organizations to investigate reports that Sikhs are experiencing human and civil rights abuses, violations of religious rights, or other discrimination while held in ICE or other detention facilities. If we believe the claims have merit, we will then initiate action on behalf of the detainees whose rights are being violated with the goal of changing the systems and policies that enable the problem to occur in the first place.

If the Sikh Coalition doesn't work on immigration cases, what work have you done in this area? The Sikh Coalition advocates for the interests of Sikhs whose civil rights have been violated based on their Sikh identity. In doing so, we have taken action in support of Sikhs in the custody of ICE and CBP, often partnering along the way with other immigration and civil rights organizations. This work has included:

- Criticizing the Biden Administration's new restrictive rules around asylum, which adversely affect Sikhs and others seeking to exercise their internationally-recognized human rights, in 2024.
- Opposing CBP's confiscation and destruction of migrants' personal property, including religious articles of faith like Sikh dastaars, alongside the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), ACLU-AZ, and other Sikh organizations from 2022 to 2024.
- Publishing an informational resource for Sikh asylum seekers and their attorneys alongside the Stanford Law School's Religious Liberty Clinic and Harvard Law School's Religious Freedom Clinic in 2021.
- Advocating against human rights abuses (including punitive and discriminatory measures against Sikhs and Cubans) in an El Paso, Texas, ICE facility in 2019.

Learn more about all of this work [on our website](#). Moving forward, we look forward to increasing our advocacy activities around protecting immigrants' rights and promoting compassionate, practical solutions to immigration challenges alongside other communities and allied groups.

Does the Sikh Coalition provide articles of faith to Sikhs inside detention centers? If you or somebody you know is having their religious rights violated inside a U.S. detention facility, please contact the Sikh Coalition to learn more about the resources we provide. We continue to push ICE to provide and respect religious accommodations; when problems arise, including shortages of religious materials or resources (including gutkas, karas and turban material), the Sikh Coalition works with community members across the United States to ensure that these problems are promptly addressed. (If you have need of these materials, please reach out to community@sikhcoalition.org.)

Questions on Citizenship

What is the Sikh Coalition's position on a path to citizenship? In general, the Sikh Coalition supports immigration proposals that involve a path to citizenship for individuals who have been living undocumented and "in the shadows" but also contributing economically and socially to their communities while abiding by state and local laws. Almost all bipartisan immigration reform proposals for the past several decades have included some version of such a path to citizenship, and we believe it is fundamentally a good-faith starting point for bipartisan immigration reform and border security conversations and compromises.

What is the Sikh Coalition's position on the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program? The Sikh Coalition is generally supportive of programs like DACA or various iterations of legislation like the DREAM Act that appropriately recognize a commitment to becoming law-abiding and contributing members of our society for individuals who came to the United States through no choice of their own. Policies that unjustly punish immigrant children and/or those who have spent their whole lives working hard to pursue the American dream violate the spirit of this nation's founding, laws, and values.

Does the Sikh Coalition support birthright citizenship? Yes. The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is unambiguous in its guarantee of birthright citizenship, which means that persons born in U.S. territories are automatically citizens of the United States. (Note that birthright citizenship is different from naturalization or other processes by which one can become a U.S. citizen, many of which are addressed elsewhere in this document.) This practice is common to [more than 30 countries](#) around the world. Numerous immigrant communities—including the Sikh community, for the past 130 years—have grown and thrived in this country not just because of immigration from other countries but through the birth of new Americans by those immigrants. Maintaining birthright citizenship is in keeping with the most fundamental history and values of the United States as a nation of immigrants.

Questions on Immigration Enforcement

Does the Sikh Coalition support deporting violent criminals? In some cases, deportation is the correct and necessary course of action in specific immigration cases—including individuals who have committed violent crimes. In assessing each case, it is critical that government agencies function in a transparent, consistent, and accountable manner and that they provide for every individual's constitutionally guaranteed due process rights (including fair hearings before unbiased judges and assistance from competent interpreters where applicable). In the

context of this discussion, it is important to note that undocumented immigrants [commit fewer crimes](#) than citizens.

When considering the deportation of individuals who are *not* violent criminals, we believe that immigration officials must make and policies must lead to safe and humane decisions. This means that deportation should never separate families (e.g. undocumented parents and their U.S. citizen children). It also means that deportation should not risk putting individuals into a dangerous environment—for instance, sending legal immigrants with [Temporary Protected Status](#) back to war torn countries like Ukraine and Haiti. And finally, it means that deportation should not transplant a person to a country where they have no practical connections or life experiences, as is the case with so-called third-country deportation or threats to deport individuals who came to the United States as children (see the above question regarding DACA for more).

What is the Sikh Coalition’s position on separating families at the border? Families should remain together. Unless there is evidence of neglect or violence, children should never be placed in detention facilities that separate them from their immediate families. Beyond physical danger and trauma associated with family separations, Sikh youth separated from their families face a threat of losing their identity with caretakers who do not understand the faith, language, or culture. As mentioned above, we believe that policies that unjustly punish immigrant children are deeply immoral and contradictory to our values.

Does the Sikh Coalition support “sanctuary city” policies? The Sikh Coalition is less interested in political labels like “sanctuary” or “anti-sanctuary” and more interested in the practical effects of state and city laws on how individuals’ civil rights and due process are respected or protected, regardless of their immigration status. As stated above, we generally support states and cities taking thoughtful and innovative steps regarding those rights, which can take many different forms.

What is the Sikh Coalition’s position on immigration raids? Sweeping immigration raids, where armed agents move into a location where they merely suspect undocumented people are present and detain multiple people to interrogate, have a documented history of leading to civil rights violations and injuries, for both undocumented individuals and others. From a legal perspective, immigration raids also clash with the fundamental notion of how laws are enforced in the United States—ideas like the importance of specific, limited warrants being obtained through the legal process; an aversion to profiling people based on suspicions about their appearance or background; and everyone deserving due process and the right to counsel when interacting with law enforcement. For these reasons, we oppose immigration raids as a practice.

Does the Sikh Coalition support “protected areas” being specifically exempt from immigration raids? Yes. In 2011, 2013, and 2021, the Department of Homeland Security issued memos outlining why ICE and CBP should refrain from conducting immigration enforcement “in or near a location that would restrain people’s access to essential services or engagement in essential activities.” This common sense policy is meant to protect basic humanitarian access for all people, regardless of their immigration status, to places like schools, hospitals and other healthcare facilities, houses of worship (including gurdwaras), places where children gather or are cared for, social services establishments (e.g. domestic violence shelters), and places where disaster relief services are being provided. As a matter of principle, we support this exemption and efforts to protect it. We also believe that nearly all members of

our community can likely agree that armed agents entering our gurdwaras, whether in raids or with warrants, is unacceptable: It is not appropriate, respectful, or conducive to the sense of community and belonging inherent to our gurdwaras.

Other Immigration Questions

What is the Sikh Coalition's position on asylum? The right to claim asylum is an internationally recognized human right—and one that Sikhs have used to flee religious and political persecution from India to countries around the world, including the United States. Rather than infringing upon this right with arbitrary limits on the number of asylum cases or reductions in asylees' rights or resources, policymakers should be working to expand our court system to handle asylum cases and provide better translation services to those in need.

As mentioned above, it is also essential that anyone who is detained by the U.S. government, whether it be related to criminal charges or immigration matters, has the right to receive all of the protections guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and federal law. Thus, migrants and asylum-seekers must be afforded due process, which requires that they are provided with a full and fair hearing to determine whether they should be released from custody based upon an individual assessment of whether they are a flight risk or pose a danger to the community. These hearings should consider all relevant factors, including whether an individual has family with whom they can stay during the pendency of their case, their financial means in order to determine what constitutes a reasonable bond, and whether there are other non-monetary means (including electronic monitoring and regular check-ins) to assure their appearance in court. In the context of this conversation, it is important to note that immigrants in general and migrants seeking asylum specifically overwhelmingly return for court dates.

Does the Sikh Coalition support open borders? The United States, like all nations, has a host of laws designed to enforce border security. Those laws should be humane, equitable, and provide fair due process protections to all individuals. Any policy proposal that is alleged to increase border security should be devoid of racism, classism, and bigotry that dehumanize whole communities or further jeopardize the safety of minorities, including Sikhs, living inside the United States.

Does the Sikh Coalition support any denaturalization? In some specific and rare cases, it may be necessary to investigate fraud or abuse in the naturalization process. However, the Sikh Coalition is extremely skeptical that any such fraud or abuse is widespread, and very wary of denaturalization as an anti-immigrant political agenda item.