

## **Guide: Celebrating California Sikh Awareness & Appreciation Month (SAAM)**

Updated October 2021

### **Why Celebrate SAAM**

Having an official recognition of Sikhs by your local government helps broaden public awareness by making news and ensuring that political officials recognize the issues facing the local Sikh community. Beyond enhancing civic and political participation for the local Sikh community, a SAAM recognition also gives the sangat an opportunity to host events in participation with schools, law enforcement, libraries, parks, and other governmental entities.

### **The Possibilities of SAAM**

Prior to COVID-19, sangats have used SAAM as a way to raise awareness about Sikhs to their local community. Some in-person examples are listed below of how volunteers capitalize on the important recognition of SAAM. Please continue to follow local COVID-19 guidance and public health and safety rules and regulations before organizing any SAAM event.

- Distribute “[Who Are The Sikhs](#)” posters and “[The Sikhs](#)” brochures at schools, police departments, libraries, and community centers;
- Present [Sikh Awareness Presentations](#) to employers, schools, government offices, and law enforcement;
- Distribute anti-bullying resources to schools;
- Host interfaith events such as a gurdwara [open house](#);

These examples are some of the most popular and easy events local communities can participate in SAAM. There can be additional opportunities to help put together different events for your community. If you would like to discuss ways you can host an event in honor of SAAM, please contact [community@sikhcoalition.org](mailto:community@sikhcoalition.org).

### **Understanding SAAM Government Recognitions**

There is no difference between a proclamation, resolution, or citation. They are each an official government recognition that celebrates or acknowledges an important event or community.

While your school board, county, or city may have declared Sikh Awareness Month in the past, *the recognition needs to be repeated every year*. Every change in government leadership after elections is an opportunity to create new relationships with policy makers who influence our lives.

### **How to get SAAM**

1. Identify a local government office (city council, county board, or school board) that you want to contact and find their contact information at <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>.

2. Send a short message, including draft proclamation language to their office. Below is a sample draft email; see below for draft proclamation language (in blue).

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_:*

*I am a resident of [city/county/school district] and writing on behalf of the local Sikh community in this area. As you may know, November is Sikh Awareness & Appreciation Month in California. We are interested in working with you to introduce a local proclamation to raise awareness about Sikhs.*

*[You may include information about your local Sikh community here]*

*To assist you, I am providing draft language for a proclamation below. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [email/phone].*

*Thank you for your consideration.*

*Looking forward to hearing from you.*

*Respectfully,*

*[Your name]*

3. Make sure to follow-up in a week if you have not heard back from anyone. Sometimes government officials and their offices are extremely busy and may not have yet gotten to your message.
4. Take pictures of (1) the resolution/proclamation and (2) community members' acceptance of it. Share your success and pictures to [media@sikhcoalition.org](mailto:media@sikhcoalition.org) so that we can highlight them on our social media channels!

### **Draft SAAM Proclamation**

*WHEREAS, California and our nation are at once blessed and enriched by the unparalleled diversity of our residents; and*

*WHEREAS: Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world and today, there are more than 25 million Sikhs worldwide and over 500,000 Sikhs in the United States; and*

*WHEREAS: Sikhs have been living in the United States for more than 120 years, and during the early 20th century, thousands of Sikh Americans worked on farms, in lumber mills and mines, and on the Oregon, Pacific & Eastern Railroad; and*

*WHEREAS, Sikhs, who originated from Punjab (South Asia), first entered California in 1899 through the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco, California and by 1910, these pioneers turned to farming in the Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Imperial Valleys; and*

*WHEREAS, On October 14, 1912, the first gurdwara (Sikh house of worship) 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 Khalsa Diwan Society; and*

*WHEREAS, There are now close to 300 known gurdwaras in the United States, 82 of which are in California; and*

*WHEREAS, Sikh Americans pursue diverse professions, and make rich contributions to the social, cultural, and economic vibrancy of the United States, including as small business owners, attorneys, first-responders, members of the military and make significant contributions to our great nation in agriculture, trucking, finance, technology and more; and*

*WHEREAS, Sikh farmers contribute abundantly towards production of peaches, raisins, grapes, almonds, pistachios, okra, and other specialized crops of fruits, vegetables, and nuts in the United States; and*

*WHEREAS, Sikh Americans have served and continue to serve as elected officials in many California cities; and*

*WHEREAS, Sikh Americans throughout California celebrate the coronation of Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and other historical events at the gurdwaras and through parades in cities across California and the United States*

*WHEREAS, Sikhs have been targeted since they came to the United States over a century ago. In the early 1900s in Bellingham, WA, lumberjacks attacked hundreds of Sikh mill workers in their homes, beating them, stealing their valuables, and forcing them out of the city, known as the “Bellingham Riots”; and*

*WHEREAS, Due to ignorance and hate, Sikhs experienced an uptake in discrimination, harassment, and violence after 9/11. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi - America's first deadly hate crime after 9/11. On September 15, 2001, Mr. Sodhi was planting flowers at his Mesa, Arizona gas station when he was shot and killed; and*

*WHEREAS, Sikhs continue to experience violence, including the senseless murders of Surinder Singh and Gurmej Singh Atwal in Elk Grove, California, on March 4, 2011. On August 5, 2012 a gunman with neo-Nazi ties killed seven Sikhs at a gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, and this massacre remains one of the deadliest acts of violence in an American house of worship in our nation's history.*

*WHEREAS, The most recently available FBI data shows that in 2020 hate incidents against the Sikh community increased by 37 percent and research conducted by the Sikh community shows that Sikh students, particularly those who carry the identity, experience bullying at rates twice the national average. Sadly, Sikhs were once again among the top five most targeted faith groups in the United States; and*

*WHEREAS, Sikhs have been the subject of hate crimes because of their articles of faith, including a turban and beard, which represent the Sikh religious commitment to justice, equality, and dignity for all. The Sikh American community continues to peacefully overcome attacks on its identity and practices, whether in the form of bullying, employment discrimination, or hate crimes. This hate has been met with unwavering courage, strength, compassion, resilience and chardi kala (eternal optimism); and*

*WHEREAS, We honor the life of Taptejdeep Singh, who was a victim of the May 26, 2021 mass shooting at the San Jose VTA. Taptejdeep spent his final moments trying to keep others safe and attempted to secure the building. Even in these moments of chaos, Taptejdeep was living by the values of Sikhi: living in service and protection of others and;*

*WHEREAS, Sikh Americans distinguished themselves by fostering respect among all people through faith and service. In California, this service includes numerous seva (community service) projects throughout the COVID-19 pandemic like langar (free community kitchen), delivering groceries and prescriptions to seniors, assisting in local meal distribution efforts, cards for healthcare workers, and more and; ; now, therefore, be it*

*Resolved, That [Jurisdiction] recognizes and acknowledges the significant contributions made by Californians of Sikh heritage to our state, and by adoption of this resolution, seeks to afford all Californians the opportunity to better understand, recognize, and appreciate the rich history and shared principles of Sikh Americans; and be it further*

*Resolved, That [Jurisdiction] condemns all hate crimes and bias incidents against Sikh Americans and encourages all Sikhs to practice their faith freely and fearlessly; and be it further*

*NOW, THEREFORE, I [Name of Official], [Title] on this XX day of [Month] 2021, do hereby proclaim the month of November 2021 to be SIKH AWARENESS AND APPRECIATION MONTH.*