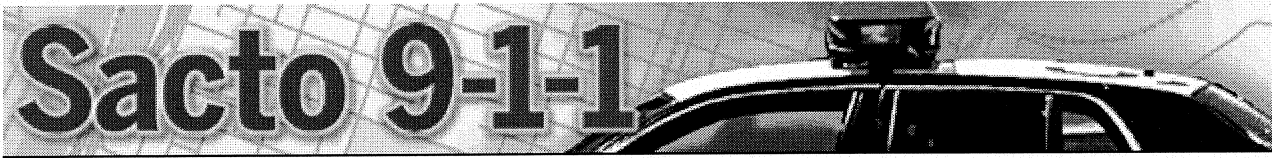


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Harris rules on Folsom man's beard, Sikhs join growing protest

By Stephen Magagnini
smagagnini@sacbee.com

Civil rights groups today are defending the rights of a Sikh American from Folsom to become a state correctional officer without shaving his beard.

State Attorney General Kamala Harris has filed a 22-page motion in Sacramento Superior Court backing a state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation claim that Trilochan Oberoi couldn't be properly fitted for a gas mask unless he shaved and therefore cannot become a prison guard.

The beard is a significant symbol of his Sikh faith.

Oberoi, a former commander in the Indian Navy, sued the CDCR, claiming they violated his civil rights and discriminated against him.

Oberoi "cannot establish discrimination," Harris wrote, because there's no evidence that beard exemptions have ever been granted to any other applicant "for any reason, including medical, during the fit portion of the application process since its inception in 2004."

Oberoi's attorney, Harmeet K. Dhillon, said this morning that the CDCR grants medical exemptions to African American men who can't shave their beards for medical reasons. "If you're a black guy with bad skin you get an exemption, if you're a Sikh who follows your religion you don't."

Representatives of 32 civil rights organizations - including Jewish, Muslim and constitution rights groups - signed a letter today asking Gov. Brown to follow federal law.

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