



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

Sanders Supports Religious Garb Bill to Prevent Workplace Discrimination

JAMES SANDERS JR. March 4, 2015

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ALBANY, N.Y., March 3, 2015- Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Queens) and the Bangladeshi American Advocacy Group held a press conference on the Bangladeshi-Americans Annual Lobby Day to support the passing of Senate Bill S3263 and Assembly Bill A2049, which would prohibit discrimination in the workplace against attire that is worn for a religious purpose.

Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Queens), the prime sponsor of Senate Bill S3263, stated, "I am proud to support this legislation, which will help protect the religious freedom that this country was founded on. In 2015, in a city as culturally diverse as New York City, people should not be facing hatred or discrimination based on their faith. We should not ostracize those who choose to wear religious garb or segregate them in the workplace. We should be finding ways to bring people together, not drive them further apart."

Mr. Kamal Bhuiyan, Chairman of the Bangladeshi American Advocacy Group stated, "A person should be able to work and practice their religion. On our the Bangladeshi-Americans Annual Lobby Day, we are proud to stand up for the religious and workers' rights of all New Yorkers and urge all of our state lawmakers to support the passage of the Religious Garb Bill to continue to ensure that all workers are treated equally under the law regardless of their race, religion or ethnicity."

The legislation was proposed in response to a series of cases and concerns from religious communities throughout New York who were discriminated in the workplace due to their religious garb or facial grooming. Kevin Harrington, a Sikh subway motorman who worked for the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) for 20 years and was honored for leading passengers to safety during 9/11, was ordered to remove his turban in 2005. He was told that if he refused to remove his turban, he would lose his job as a train operator and the privileges he had earned based on his years of service. As a practicing Sikh, Mr. Harrington is required to maintain uncut hair and cover it with a turban. *Harrington v. MTA*, a civil suit filed on Mr. Harrington's behalf was settled on May 31, 2012, when the MTA abandoned its initial attempts to force Sikh workers to remove their turbans and its later attempt to force them to wear an MTA logo on the turban. Instead, Sikhs were allowed to wear their turbans with or without the MTA logo.

Mr. Kevin Harrington stated, "I glad that the New York State Legislature introduced this important piece of legislation because it stops the policy of branding or segregating workers. In my case, the MTA honored me for driving my train in reverse away from the towers on 9/11 and leading passengers

to safety. They called me a 'hero of 9/11.' Policies that prevent workers from practicing their religion are driven by fear and make no sense.”

Dr. Paul Uppal, Secretary of the Guru Nanak Darbar of Albany, Inc. stated, “As a Sikh American, whose community has continuously faced discrimination in the workplace, too often I have seen employees leave their job because of racism or religious intolerance. We call for the passage of this important bill which will prevent future cases of prejudice from reoccurring throughout the state.”

The legislation amends the civil-rights law, the executive law and the labor law in relation to prohibiting discrimination against religious attire, including facial hair. This bill protects the rights of employees against discrimination for wearing any sort of religiously motivated or mandated garb or appurtenances, including turbans, kippahs, hijabs and beards, as long as such garb or appearance does not interfere with the responsibilities of the position.

Assemblyman David Weprin (D-Queens), the prime sponsor of Assembly Bill A2049, stated, “An individual should never have to choose between their place of employment and their religious observance. I am proud to advocate for policies that codify inclusiveness and ensure discrimination will not occur no matter who the employer is.”

Rabbi Israel Rubin, Regional Director of Chabad of the Capital District stated, “We enthusiastically support this important bill which is calling for equal employment opportunities for all New Yorkers regardless of religious attire and facial grooming. This religious observance issue confronts many Orthodox Jewish New Yorkers, who ought to be protected against discrimination at their worksites. We strongly urge all NYS Legislators to enable the passage of this vital bill.”

Assemblyman Michael Miller (D-Queens), the main sponsor of the Bangladeshi-Americans Annual Lobby Day in the New York State Assembly stated, “Fighting discrimination in all of its forms is one of the greatest responsibilities that faces us a state and a nation. This legislation moves us forward in

this struggle, further proving that New York is and will continue to be a leader when dealing with issues of discrimination. Ethnic and religious diversity are vital aspects of our state, I'm glad to see Assemblyman Weprin and State Senator Sanders take such a decisive stand in favor of protecting the rights of all our citizens."

Senator José Peralta (D-Queens), the main sponsor of the Bangladeshi-Americans Annual Lobby Day in the New York State Senate stated, "I am thrilled to see members of my community and other Bangladeshi-Americans from across the state here in the capital. As a fairly new immigrant group, my Bangladeshi-American constituents have already strengthened and enriched our neighborhoods and our local economy through their contributions and customs."

Senator Leroy Comrie (D-Queens) stated, "Discrimination in all forms is abhorrent and stifles opportunities for growth. This legislation stands to reinforce what we already know: that by embracing diverse perspectives and encouraging individuality we will attract the best of the best to plant roots and make what is already the most ethnically diverse county of our great state (and indeed the world) an even richer place for workplace equality."

"It is simply unacceptable that any individual should face religious discrimination in the workplace due to their beliefs or practices, and their attire should be no exception. No one should be forced to choose between the requirements of their religious beliefs and their job, and this bill will ensure that no one will have to. I am proud to support this bill and the continued religious freedom it will bring to many New Yorkers who struggle with adversity every day," said Senator Tony Avella (D-Queens).