

June 1, 2016

Sheriff Brian Thomas
Potter County Sheriff's Office
608 S. Pierce
Amarillo, Texas 79101

Scott Brumley
County Attorney
Potter County Attorney's Office
500 S. Fillmore, Room 301
Amarillo, TX 79101

Dear Sheriff Thomas & Mr. Brumley,

The undersigned groups write to express our deep concern regarding a recent incident involving two asylum seekers from India and Pakistan, who were detained and arrested on a Greyhound bus on false charges of making terrorist threats. Mr. Daljeet Singh and Mr. Mohammed Chotri were arrested in large part because they spoke a language other than English.

On February 21, 2016, the two men were traveling aboard a Greyhound bus in Amarillo, Texas, when they were falsely accused of making a bomb threat and detained on the bus. Mr. Chotri and Mr. Singh were then arrested at gun point, forced to sit in a patrol car for three hours, and spend 30 hours in a cold jail cell without blankets. Neither man committed a crime of any kind. Moreover, fellow bus passengers unlawfully restrained Mr. Singh and prevented him from calling his English-speaking family members, who might have been able to clarify the situation. Law enforcement officials also failed to provide Punjabi language translators to both men before arresting them, removing Mr. Singh's Sikh religious headwear in public, and transporting them to a detention center.

Mr. Singh's turban was removed in violation of his religious rights and not returned to him until the next evening after he was released from detention. Mug shots of him without his turban were taken and widely distributed to the local media, causing him shame and grief. For a Sikh, the forced removal of a turban is akin to a strip search. To add insult to injury, Mr. Singh was even accused by a deputy of pretending to not know how to speak English, when in fact he is from India and recently applied for asylum in the United States.

Arrested Sunday afternoon, the two men were released Monday evening after being cleared of all wrongdoing by federal and local authorities. Neither the passenger who filed the false police report, nor the two who restrained Mr. Chotri and Mr. Singh on the bus, were reprimanded in any way. Mr. Singh believes that he and Mr. Chotri were profiled because of their skin color and language abilities, and in the case of Mr. Singh, also because of his turban.

The undersigned groups believe strongly that no one should be subject to discriminatory treatment and policing on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, or English language skills. This humiliating and offensive encounter could have been avoided if the officers were properly trained in diversity and nondiscrimination; had summoned an interpreter to the scene immediately so that the two Punjabi speakers could explain themselves; or more thoroughly

investigated the basis for the terrorism allegation, including rigorously questioning the passenger who filed the false police report.

All of us have the right to live in America free from profiling and law enforcement abuse. We would thus like to work with your office to ensure that your training procedures and response protocols are responsive to the rights of these minority communities.

Profiling. Profiling and discrimination implicates profound constitutional rights, including free religious expression and equal protection under the law. We would like to review any anti-profiling guidance that you provide to officers to ensure that similar incidents do not happen again.

Training. We request the County to require all law enforcement officers to undergo diversity training, including for the rights of those – such as Sikhs - with religious headwear or attire.¹ If such training is already in place, we would like to review it to ensure that it adequately protects these communities.

Translation Services. We request the County to ensure that immediate and adequate interpretation and translation services are provided to non-English speakers accused of criminal activity or terrorism. If such services are already in place, we would like to review all applicable policies to ensure that they adequately protect the rights of non-English speakers.

Redress. Investigating and responding to allegations of discrimination is just as important as prohibiting it. We would like to review your redress procedures to ensure that all allegations of discriminatory treatment are fully investigated and remedied.

The undersigned groups look forward to hearing from you. Should you have any questions about this matter, please contact Arjun Singh at arjun@sikhcoalition.org.

Adhikaar

American Arab Anti Discrimination Committee

American Center for Outreach

American Civil Liberties Union Texas

American Muslim Advisory Council

Arab American Institute

Asian Americans Advancing Justice

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance

Center for New Community

Council on American-Islamic Relations

Council on American-Islamic Relations-Texas, Dallas, Houston & San Antonio

Dream Defenders

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Grassroots Leadership

Institute for Diversity and Civic Life

Interfaith Center of New York

Islamic Networks Group

¹ Note, for example, that the U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service offers a free training on Sikh cultural competency for law enforcement and government agencies.

Japanese American Citizens League
Maitri
Military Religious Freedom Foundation
Muslim Advocates
Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative
Muslim Community Network
Muslim Public Affairs Council
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
Native American Rights Fund
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Sikh Coalition
South Asian American Policy & Research Institute
South Asian Americans Leading Together
South Asian Bar Association of New York
South Asian Bar Association of North America
South Asian Network
Texas Impact
Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy
The National Sikh Campaign
United Sikhs
United We Dream