

Winston Wins Historic Federal Appeal That Allows Sikh-American Marine Recruits to Freely Practice Their Religious Beliefs

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Winston attorneys secured a precedent-setting preliminary injunction in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit that allows Sikh recruits to immediately begin U.S. Marine Corps boot camp without having to compromise their religious beliefs.

The preliminary injunction allows the men to keep their articles of faith intact, which include wearing unshorn hair, a turban, a steel bracelet, a small ceremonial sword, a comb, and a special undergarment. For many observant Sikhs, failure to maintain these articles of faith is akin to committing adultery and throughout history, Sikhs have chosen death over cutting their hair.

“More than 100 Sikhs already serve with their articles of faith in the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy. We hope this injunction will lead to comprehensive policy across all of the Armed Forces for all Americans,” said Washington, D.C. Partner **Amandeep Sidhu**.

In April 2022, Winston, along with the Sikh Coalition and co-counsel at Becket and BakerHostetler, filed a religious discrimination suit against the U.S. Department of Defense on behalf of Sikh-American recruits who were denied a religious accommodation from the Marine Corps to wear their articles of faith. In response, the Marine Corps agreed to accommodate Sikh Americans only after they completed boot camp. In other words, the Marine Corps determined that Sikh-American recruits had to relinquish their Sikh identity in order to become Marines.

Plaintiffs sought a preliminary injunction in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia that would allow them to attend boot camp while their case was litigated, but they were denied. On review of the denial, the D.C. Circuit handed down this historic win for the Sikh Marine recruits and for religious freedom.

The appellate court rejected the Marine Corps’ arguments, holding that the preliminary injunction would increase diversity in the military and was in keeping with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The court also noted that the Marine Corps’ rejection of the Sikh articles of faith is inconsistent with its policies that allow beards for medical reasons and longer hair for women.

The Winston team that secured this historic win is led by **Amandeep Sidhu** and includes **Lisa Coutu, John Harding, Nasir Hussain, Hannah Shankman, T. Reed Stephens, Mia Uhunmwuango**, and **Jamie Vargo**.

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