

## First Amendment topics >



### The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. [ABOUT THE FIRST AMENDMENT >](#)

## News Story

### Sikh charges NYPD with bias over beard, turban

By The Associated Press  
06.12.02

*Editor's note: Amric Singh Rathour's attorney, Ravinder Bhalla, said he would file a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Manhattan on March 4, 2003, against the police department, Commissioner Ray Kelly and the city, claiming a violation of Rathour's civil rights. Rathour's complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was dismissed, Bhalla said.*

NEW YORK — A Sikh man has filed a federal discrimination complaint against the New York Police Department, saying he was fired during his training period because he would not shave his beard or remove his turban, signs of his religious faith.

Amric Singh Rathour, 25, of Ozone Park in Queens, had applied to be a traffic enforcement agent with the NYPD last year. After passing the required tests, he was sworn in as a new officer on June 18, 2001, according to the complaint filed June 10 with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

During his eight-week training period, he and his supervisors clashed over his wearing a turban and keeping his facial hair, according to the complaint.

Sikhism, founded in India more than 500 years ago, requires followers to leave their hair uncut as one of the signs of faith.

On Aug. 27, Rathour was fired from the NYPD, which he alleges was discrimination.

"I was fired because I refused to give up my right as an American to practice my religion," he said at a news conference.

Officer Guy Braun, a police spokesman, said the department does not comment on pending legal complaints. A call to the EEOC office in New York was not immediately returned.

Rathour's attorney, Ravinder Bhalla, said that while there were no turbaned Sikhs working in police departments in the United States, Sikhs with beards and turbans had been able to work in other law enforcement departments including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Metropolitan Police Force in London.

Bhalla also made reference to a New Jersey case, *Fraternal Order of Police v. City of Newark*. In October 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court turned away that appeal from the city of Newark, which was seeking to reverse a lower court

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ruling that found efforts to bar two Sunni Muslim police officers from wearing beards violated the officers' freedom of religion.

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Bhalla said he and others involved had tried to discuss the situation with the city but had not gotten any response, which led to the filing.

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"We're looking for a policy change, essentially," Bhalla said. "If Sikhs can serve in other police jurisdictions ... how is New York City different?"

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