

April 20, 2021

To: Randal Taylor, Police Chief
Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department
50 N. Alabama St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204
Via Email: randal.taylor@indy.gov

Paul Keenan, Special Agent in Charge
Federal Bureau of Investigation, Indianapolis Field Office
8825 Nelson B Klein Pkwy
Indianapolis, IN 46250
Via Email: Pkeenan@FBI.gov

Re: Investigation into the April 15th FedEx Shooting by Brandon Scott Hole

Dear Police Chief Taylor and Special Agent in Charge Keenan,

I write to you in my capacity as the Legal Director for the Sikh Coalition with regard to Brandon Scott Hole's ("Mr. Hole") attack on the FedEx facility in Indianapolis on April 15, 2021, killing eight individuals and wounding at least 5 others. As you know, four out of those eight individuals killed were members of the Sikh faith. We have been in direct contact with many of these victims, their families, as well as the broader Indianapolis Sikh community, in order to assist them in coordinating efforts to learn more information from law enforcement as well as to provide local support on a myriad of issues that have arisen as a result of this heinous attack. We feel that it is incumbent on us to represent the Sikh community's interests in providing any resources we can to ensure that all investigators assigned to this matter have the requisite cultural competence and other information necessary to conduct a thorough and complete investigation into whether bias motivating factors were present to any degree in this case.

By way of background, the Sikh Coalition is the largest Sikh civil rights organization in the United States and is a community-based organization that defends civil rights and civil liberties in the United States, educates the broader community about Sikhs and diversity, and fosters civic engagement amongst Sikh-Americans. The Sikh Coalition owes its existence in large part to the effort to combat uninformed discrimination and bias against Sikh-Americans after September 11, 2001. In addition, the Sikh Coalition works with government agencies, including local and federal law enforcement agencies across the country, to provide cultural awareness training and provide context for the inclusion of bias motivating factors in criminal investigations where warranted. To be clear, while we understand the offender is dead and no charges will be brought, our goal is to



ensure that the investigation itself is cognizant of and acknowledges all relevant factors leading to this attack in a manner that can bring some semblance of justice to the community at large.

I. Factual Background

As you are aware, on the evening of April 15, 2021, at approximately 11:00pm, 19-year-old Mr. Hole arrived at the FedEx warehouse facility in Indianapolis with at least two loaded assault rifles. Mr. Hole is a former employee of that facility and thus had knowledge that the warehouse was primarily staffed by employees of the Sikh faith, many of whom are more recent immigrants who speak with accents and/or entirely in the Punjabi language, and who wear identifiable articles of faith. In fact, according to the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, 90% of the workforce at this particular warehouse are members of the Sikh faith.¹ As a former FedEx employee at that facility, Mr. Hole was familiar with the shift change schedule and likely knew that there would be increased foot traffic at that time with employees switching shifts, going on meal breaks, and collecting their paychecks on the way out from a front room in the facility.

At some point within minutes of his arrival, Mr. Hole began shooting at individuals in the parking lot and then moved inside the facility. During the gunfire, Mr. Hole specifically aimed at the Sikh employees and made a concerted effort to avoid non-Sikhs at various points. In fact, one eyewitness account includes information that Mr. Hole told a white woman running towards him to get out of the way, just after having shot a Sikh man in the face. Additional eyewitness reports indicate that, once inside the facility, Mr. Hole was able to see through the glass doors into the area where employees were collecting paychecks, and poked his gun through a hole in order to aim and fire at a turbaned Sikh man, Mr. Jaswinder Singh. The room was filled with Sikh workers, and Mr. Hole continued to bang and scream at them to let him in to kill them all. Ultimately, Mr. Hole killed eight people including Amarjit Sekhon, Jasvinder Kaur, Amarjeet Kaur, and Jaswinder Singh, who are members of the Sikh faith, and wounded several others including [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], as well as leaving eyewitnesses including [REDACTED].

Mr. Hole was familiar to law enforcement from March 2020, when his mother called the police in response to an attack he perpetrated against his family members.² At that time, your Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (“IMPD”) arrived and detained him. Mr. Hole was anxious and told officers he did not want anyone to see what was on his personal computer. IMPD searched through the computer and located what appeared to be white supremacist websites and material on

¹ Casey Smith and Rick Callahan, *Victims of mass shooting at FedEx warehouse in Indianapolis identified; four Sikhs among the eight dead*, Chicago Tribune (Apr 17, 2021), available at <https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/ct-aud-nw-indianapolis-fedex-shooting-20210417-kopfqahckra5panphi66mgnjxy-story.html>.

² Moshtaghia, Aremis and Madeline Holcome, *A Year Before the Indianapolis FedEx mass shooting, the gunman browsed White supremacist websites, police say*, CNN (April 20, 2021), available at <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/20/us/indianapolis-shooting-fedex-tuesday/index.html>.



his computer.³ Officers also recovered a shotgun and transported Mr. Hole to the hospital over mental health concerns. Mr. Hole was subject to a hearing pursuant to Indiana's red flag law to determine whether he was competent to carry a firearm, however the petition was not filed because IMDP officers took at face value that Mr. Hole would not seek a return of the gun. Thus, a judge was never able to make a determination as to whether Mr. Hole could legally purchase another weapon given his mental health issues and white supremacist connections. It is our understanding that at some point shortly thereafter, Mr. Hole was terminated from FedEx.

II. Background on Sikhism and its Religious Articles of Faith

Sikhism is the world's fifth largest organized religion. There are approximately 25 million Sikhs around the world with over 500,000 here in the United States. The founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, was born in 1469 in Punjab, India. His teachings, as well as the teachings of nine successive Gurus, form the basis of the Sikh religion. The Sikh religion is monotheistic, believing in one God that is all loving, all pervading, and eternal. This God of love is obtained through grace and sought by service to humankind. Guru Nanak rejected the caste system, and declared all human beings, including women, to be equal. He taught that God was universal to all – not limited to any religion, nation, race, color, or gender.

Sikh religious practices include wearing five articles of faith comprised of maintaining *kesh* (uncut hair) out of respect for God's will and covered by a *dastaar* (turban) or *chunni* (headscarf) as a reminder to lead an ethical life, carrying a *kanga* (small wooden comb) as a reminder to maintain physical and spiritual cleanliness, wearing *kachera* (long cotton undershorts) as a reminder of the importance of marital fidelity, wearing a *kara* (steel bracelet), and carrying a *kirpan* (article of faith resembling a knife) as a reminder to defend the rights of the oppressed. These articles of faith have deep religious significance for observant Sikhs and are visibly identifying, but are poorly understood by most Americans.⁴

I. Hate Crimes and Bias Against Sikhs in the United States

Sikhs experienced hundreds of bias-motivated crimes in the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. They suffered verbal harassment, damage to property, beatings, and even murder. Relative to other minorities, Sikhs were disproportionately targeted for discrimination because they wear turbans and maintain unshorn hair in accordance with their faith. Despite the passage of almost two decades since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, hate crimes and bias incidents continue to plague the Sikh American community. Sikhs continue to be disproportionately

³ *Id.*

⁴ Hart Research Associates and National Sikh Campaign, *Sikhism in the United States: What Americans Know and Need to Know*, (January 2015), available at <https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/sikhcampaign/pages/105/attachments/original/1467171428/sikh-report-final.pdf?1467171428>.



targeted for hate crimes and bias-based harassment. The rise of hate crimes and bias incidents against Sikh Americans was so great that in 2015 that the FBI officially began tracking them.

According to the FBI's annual report of hate crime statistics, 2019 (the most recent year of report) showed the deadliest year on record with the number of overall hate crimes at a new ten year high. In the 2019 reporting, Sikhs were the fifth most targeted religious minority. This follows the FBI's previous annual report for 2018 statistics, which reported anti-Sikh hate crimes rose by 200 percent since 2017.⁵ In the 2018 reporting, Sikhs were the third most targeted religious group behind only the Jewish and Muslim communities. Even with these alarming statistics, these numbers are likely grossly underreported as they do not account for the number of cases which were never reported to police or prosecutors in the first place; cases which law enforcement agencies or prosecutors' offices failed to investigate or appropriately charge as hate crimes; and cases which the individual law enforcement agencies failed to share with the FBI entirely.⁶

In most of those bias incidents, attackers specifically target the Sikhs because of their skin color and religious articles of faith, or because they have misidentified the religion or conflated it with terrorism. These issues, combined with the broader xenophobic undercurrent, continually puts Sikhs at high risks.⁷ A few examples include:

- On September 15, 2001, Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh gas station owner and Mesa, Arizona resident, became the first 9/11 backlash fatality after he was shot by a man who "wanted to kill a Muslim."
- On June 7, 2011, two men were sentenced in connection with a hate attack against a Sikh turban-wearing taxi driver near Sacramento, California. The two men had directed slurs at the driver, accused him of being a Muslim, and punched him numerous times on November 28, 2010. The driver suffered multiple cuts, a fracture of the orbital bone in his face and spinal fractures as a result of the attack.
- On August 5, 2012, the Sikh community fell victim to a mass shooting when a white supremacist marched into a Sikh Gurdwara (house of worship) in Oak Creek, Wisconsin and killed six worshippers and critically injured several others. The FBI concluded that the shooting was a hate crime and an act of domestic terrorism.
- In 2013, in Daytona Beach, FL, a turbaned Sikh man, on his way home from work at his liquor store, accompanied by his 14-year-old son, was shot multiple times in his vehicle while driving over a bridge. Because the Sikh man wears a turban, the police suspect the incident was a hate crime although the attacker remains at large.

⁵ See Federal Bureau of Investigations, Department of Justice, 2019 Hate Crime Statistics, available at <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/topic-pages/victims> (2019).

⁶ See *Id.*

⁷ See, e.g., Jerome Socolovsky, *Sikhs Seen as 'Hate Crime' Targets in US*, Voice of America (May 31, 2013), available at <https://www.voanews.com/usa/sikhs-seen-hate-crime-targets-us>.



- On September 21, 2013, in New York City, Dr. Prabhjot Singh, a Columbia University professor, was attacked by a large group of teenagers who shouted “get Osama” and “terrorist” as they surrounded him on bicycles, pulling his beard and punching him. Dr. Singh was hospitalized with displaced teeth, severe bruising and swelling, a small puncture in his elbow, and a possible fracture in his lower jaw.
- In August 2014, Sandeep Singh, a Sikh father in New York City, was seriously injured when a driver in a pickup truck ran him over on a public street in Queens and dragged him for 30 feet. Only moments earlier, the driver had used racial slurs against Sandeep, calling him a “terrorist” and telling him to “go back to your country.” The NYPD later arrested the driver, charging him with a hate crime and attempted murder.
- On September 8, 2015, Inderjit Mukker - a turbaned Sikh taxi driver from Darien, IL - was attacked through his open car window after pulling over to the side of the 69th Avenue in Darien while the attacker yelled “go back to your country!” and “bin Laden” at him. Mr. Mukker sustained significant physical injuries and the offender was charged with a hate crime.
- On December 12, 2015, a 34-year-old Sikh store clerk in Grand Rapids, MI was shot in the face by a masked gunman who called him a “terrorist” and said he used to kill people like him in Iraq moments before pulling the trigger.
- In October 2016, the Contra Costa County District Attorney’s Office filed assault and hate crime charges in a case where a Sikh was brutally assaulted while he was stopped in his car at an intersection. The attackers got out of their truck and attacked him through his open car window – they knocked off his turban, hit his head repeatedly, shouted “cut his f-g hair”, pulled his head out of the window, and forcibly cut his hair with a knife.⁸
- In December 2019, a Sikh Uber driver in Bellingham, WA was attacked by his passenger after the passenger made several racial slurs and told him he had “dark skin, you wear a turban, you have a beard. You’re Indian aren’t you?!” The passenger then grabbed his neck and continuously choked him until the driver was able to pull over and run away.⁹
- In January 2020, a new Sikh Gurdwara (house of worship) in Orangevale, CA was vandalized the evening of its opening celebration when vandals spray painted

⁸ Frances Kai-Hwa Wang, *Hate Crime Charges Filed in Attack on California Sikh Man*, NBC News (October 14, 2016), available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/hate-crime-charges-filed-attack-california-sikh-man-n666651>.

⁹ Denver Pratt, *Bellingham man charged with hate crime in attack on Sikh Uber driver pleads not guilty*, The Bellingham Herald (December 13, 2019), available at <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/crime/article238364513.html>.



“White Power” and a swastika symbol on the concrete slab that had not yet been etched with its name.¹⁰

- In April 2020, a turbaned Sikh store owner in Lakewood, CO was told “go back to your country” before being run over and nearly killed by an attacker who became enraged when the man spoke Punjabi with his wife. Hate crime charges are currently pending.¹¹

Because of this discrimination and post-September 11th backlash against Sikhs, political leaders across the country, including former Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, the Trump Administration’s Department of Justice, President Biden’s Administration, as well as members of the United States Congress, have condemned hate and bias against Sikhs and have called on law enforcement to be vigilant in protecting Sikhs from bias-motivated attacks. This includes appropriately addressing and acknowledging bias incidents against Sikhs when warranted.

On March 21, 2021, President Biden specifically addressed the importance of combatting racism, xenophobia, discrimination, hate, and other forms of hate and intolerance.¹² He simultaneously recognized that systemic racism and white supremacy have plagued the United States.¹³ To advance the goals of equality, President Biden committed his administration to addressing issues of equity and racial justice, both domestically and abroad.¹⁴

II. The Totality of the Circumstances Indicate Bias-Motivation Cannot be Dismissed in this Case

It is clear from IMPD’s prior interaction and experience with Mr. Hole, as well as specific facts we have elicited from witnesses and victims of the April 15th shooting, that Mr. Hole went to the FedEx facility with the intent of killing members of the Sikh community. Given his prior white supremacist research and interest, there is no dismissing the fact that Mr. Hole’s methodically planned attack – during a shift change when there would be significantly more employees going in and out of the facility making them easily accessible – was carried out at a facility where he

¹⁰ Alexandra Yoon-Hendricks, ‘Here in solidarity’: Residents offer support to Orangevale Sikh temple after racist vandalism, *The Sacramento Bee* (January 25, 2020), available at <https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/article239645078.html>.

¹¹ May Ortega, *Man Accused of Running Over Sikh in Lakewood Charged With Hate Crime*, *Colorado Public Radio* (July 23, 2020), available at <https://www.cpr.org/2020/07/23/man-accused-of-running-over-sikh-in-lakewood-charged-with-hate-crime/>.

¹² See Statement by President Biden on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, March 21, 2021, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/21/statement-by-president-biden-on-the-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-racial-discrimination/>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*



knew the vast majority of workers to be both Indian and Sikh, at a time when violence against Sikh Americans and Asian-Americans in general has grown nationwide.¹⁵

To be clear, while Mr. Hole may not have gone to this facility to kill a specific individual, he did go there with the knowledge that he was attacking a specific community, namely the Sikh community. It must be noted that Mr. Hole did not randomly select a location to target; rather, he deliberately chose this particular facility in a premeditated fashion. Mr. Hole picked up a firearm, left his home, and drove to the FedEx warehouse where he had previously worked, while bypassing any number of other sites where this unfortunate attack may have been carried out. He was acutely aware that the majority of employees are Sikh immigrants. He was similarly aware that staff members were regularly segregated such that certain shifts were staffed primarily by Sikh employees, while other shifts staffed primarily by white employees. In addition, the break area also tended to be segregated and frequented primarily by white staff. Notably, this area was not targeted by Mr. Hole. This acute understanding of the facility and employee schedules allowed him to maximize the number of victims.

In the wake of this tragedy, the Sikh Coalition has received at least one email from an individual praising Mr. Hole as a hero, specifically related to his murder of Sikhs, and encouraging another mass shooting event. This type of recognition indicates that his crimes may be used by like-minded people to encourage other similar acts of violence, thereby escalating the threat the Sikh community faces even further.

A complete and thorough investigation – including determining the motives behind this attack and any connection Mr. Hole has to hate and white supremacy groups – is essential to providing justice and building trust between the Sikh community and local and federal law enforcement. A full and transparent recitation of those facts is also necessary to maintaining that trust moving forward. The reality is, even if Mr. Hole was a disgruntled employee due to the fact that Sikh employees were getting more hours than him or for any other reason, it is essential to connect the dots of all of his activities leading up to this tragic attack to fully understand the role racism, xenophobia, and white supremacy may have played in his alleged anger toward his former employer. The normalization of anti-Asian and anti-immigrant sentiment, combined with the depiction of those wearing turbans and maintaining facial hair as terrorists, have created an environment in which Sikhs are systematically targeted for hate crimes and other forms of intolerance and discrimination. Law enforcement agencies cannot overlook the likelihood that these narratives played a role in Mr. Hole's attack. Rather, all of these factors must be weighed when determining Mr. Hole's motives and mindset. Thus, as we speak with victims and families in the community, we are increasingly concerned that bias was a motivating factor, that Mr. Hole specifically targeted Sikhs, and that the IMPD and FBI must do more to interview these survivors and witnesses regarding what actually transpired on April 15th.

¹⁵ *Id.*




This includes law enforcement providing survivors and victims' families with regular updates on the investigation and access to legal and medical assistance as needed. Finally, the law enforcement community must make clear that these acts of violence, hatred, and white supremacy will not be tolerated.

To that end, The Sikh Coalition strongly urges both the IMPD and the FBI to fully investigate Mr. Hole's attack on the Indianapolis FedEx facility, including all bias motivating factors which may be at play. We also request a meeting for you to discuss the investigation and to introduce you to additional survivors you have not yet interviewed.

I look forward to your immediate response.

Sincerely,



Amrith Kaur Aakre
Legal Director, The Sikh Coalition
amrith@sikhcoalition.org
847.786.5839

April 20, 2021
Date

