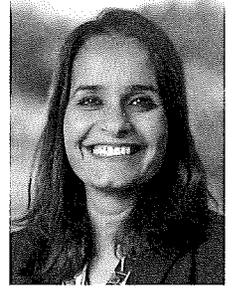


LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA



October 3, 2019

Honourable Darryl Plecas
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Room 207, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Rachna Singh MLA
Surrey - Green Timbers

ਰਚਨਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਐੱਮ ਐੱਲ ਏ
ਸਰੀ - ਗਰੀਨ ਟਿੱਬਰਜ਼

To the Honourable Mr. Speaker,

I write to you today regarding Standing Order 36, which states, "Every member desiring to speak is to rise in his or her place, uncovered, and address the speaker."

It is my understanding, the term "uncovered" may refer to anything covering the head.

However, if a Member of the Legislative Assembly wore a turban, kippah, headscarf, Indigenous headdress, or any other traditional and spiritual symbol, I expect that they would be permitted, by you, to speak in the legislature. For example, the Acting Clerk's report on dress guidelines says, "For certainty, Indigenous attire, traditional cultural attire, and religious attire continue to be considered appropriate dress."

Leaving issues of personal identity to interpretation or popular precedence makes those protections, by definition, precarious. Adopting changes to this rule will ensure the Legislature remains a welcoming space for all Canadians.

As I'm sure you are aware, precedent exists for updating the dress code in the legislature. Across Canada, provincial Standing Orders governing head covering in Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, and Alberta, have been updated to include religious, cultural, and ethnic dress. In 1994, similar legislation was passed in Ottawa.

I ask that you, as Speaker of the Legislature, make an official ruling whether Standing Order 36 or any other rule of the legislature attempts to prohibit religious and Indigenous headwear in the chamber. If you rule in the affirmative, I will be working with my caucus and the other caucuses in the legislature to urgently bring forward a proposal to change the Standing Orders to reflect our mutually-held values of reconciliation, diversity, and religious freedom.

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At a time when we are seeing alarmingly frequent expressions of hate and racism, our legislature must be a reflection of the great diversity in our wonderful province. We must also acknowledge that we can all do more to push back against those who seek to divide us.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R Singh". The signature is written in a cursive, fluid style. Below the signature, there are two short horizontal lines.

Rachna Singh
MLA for Surrey- Green Timbers