



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

## Senator Avella Advocates for Passage of His Religious Corporations Bill

TONY AVELLA June 2, 2014



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*Bill would provide means of incorporation for organized groups affiliated with the Hindu, Sikh and Islamic faiths*

(BAYSIDE, Queens) On Friday, May 30th, Senator Avella was joined by members of the Hindu and Muslim community organizations at a press conference to advocate for the passage of Senator Avella's "religious corporations" bill. Members of the Sikh community, who first brought this issue to the Senator's attention, wholeheartedly support the legislation but were unable to attend due to prior commitments.

The bill (#S731) would explicitly provide means of incorporation for organized groups affiliated with the Hindu, Sikh, and Islamic faiths to incorporate as a non-profit for legal and tax purposes. The bill passed the State Senate on May 7<sup>th</sup> and must now be passed by the State Assembly before being signed into law.

Currently, the religious corporations law explicitly names and lays out organization regulations for over 20 religious groups but does not explicitly recognize groups of the Hindu, Sikh, and Islamic faiths. Senator Avella's legislation would correct this inconsistency, and explicitly allow these groups to have the same rights to incorporation as enjoyed by others under the current New York State Religious Corporations law.

Senator Avella stated, "This is an extremely important legislation which would provide the same protections of incorporations to groups affiliated with the Hindu, Sikh, and Islamic faiths as is currently offered to many other religious corporations. Religious Corporation Law as it stands today, specifically lays out religious aspects and titles of clergy for over 20 different religious groups but not the groups who are standing with me today. My bill would correct this inequity to ensure that they are given the same rights as all the other religions groups. The State of New York must enact this bill into law as soon as possible."

Dr. Uma Mysorekar, President of the Hindu Temple Society of North America, stated, "On behalf of the Hindu Temple Society of North America and the Hindu community, we extend our deepest gratitude to Senator Avella for taking this initiative, which has been long overdue. We, at the Temple, went through some litigation a few years ago and one of the problems we did face was due to the lack of definition in the Religious Corporation Law. All these three religious faiths, which are now a part of New York and the country, have their faiths well established and all have their religious bodies which need to follow the same religious corporation laws like any other major religious faiths in this country. For that reason, we sincerely hope the Assembly would pass what has already been passed in the Senate so that we can all look forward to a modified religious corporation law."

Mr. Mohammad T. Rahman, Secretary General of the Islamic Circle of North America, stated, "This issue is very important for all religious communities, not only ours. We wholeheartedly support this bill and we want it to pass through the Assembly. New York State is home to one of the largest Muslim communities in the USA. And in this city alone, probably over one million Muslims currently reside. So we feel that this is a great need of the time. We are fortunate enough to live in a country that recognizes the rights of all people and practice of their own beliefs. On that notion, we urge the Assembly to pass this bill."

Mr. Mandeep Singh, Sikh community leader and member of the Gurudwara Sant Sagar Temple, added a statement, "The entire Sikh community strongly supports the passage of Senator Avella's religious corporation bill. This bill would give us rights that many other religious groups already have. A clear definition in the law will help us a lot going forward and developing our organizations. This is extremely important for all Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities in the State of New York and we strongly urge the

State Assembly to pass this bill.”

Senator Avella concluded, “Time is of the essence right now since the bill passed the State Senate last month. There should never be a delay when the conversation involved the expansion of religious freedom. I therefore urge the State Assembly to immediately act on this bill so it can be signed into law.”