



February 15, 2023

Seattle City Council
PO Box 94728, Seattle, WA, 98124-4728
Council@seattle.gov

Dear Seattle City Council Members,

I am writing on behalf of the [Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO \(APALA\)](#), which is a labor constituency group and nonprofit organization of API workers affiliated with the AFL-CIO, national federation of labor unions. APALA represents a wide diversity of Asian American and Pacific Islander union members and unorganized workers advocating together for racial minority, immigrant, and workers' rights. It is in this capacity that we are writing to urge Seattle City Council to pass the new ordinance to ban caste discrimination. If passed, the ordinance would add caste to the city's list of protected classes, outlawing discrimination in employment, housing, public places and contracting. It would also empower the Seattle Office for Civil Rights to investigate complaints of caste discrimination and facilitate a settlement for monetary damages or other forms of recompense.

APALA unconditionally supports the ordinance proposed by Councilmember Kshama Sawant to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle city. We stand in full solidarity with our allies at [Equality Labs](#) and the coalition of brave caste-oppressed workers, caste oppressed, racial, and gender justice organizations whose tireless organizing made this historic ordinance possible.

Freedom from caste discrimination is inextricably tied to workers' rights. In 2021, APALA [passed a resolution](#) condemning caste discrimination and added caste to our own list of protected classes. We have also publicly supported the listing of caste among the protected classes in the public sector in order to ensure that oppressed castes have unobstructed access to good jobs, quality education, social benefits, and representation at the federal, state, county and city levels including school districts. The seriousness of caste discrimination complaints arising from multiple industries including tech, university, construction, and domestic workers makes this an urgent issue.

Despite this urgency, we know that a small group of opponents are trying to use disinformation and bigotry to derail this process by intimidating dalit civil rights organizations and workers rights organizations who are coming together to build power. They use common anti-worker tactics of

smearing Dalit leaders and workers who are braving violence and discrimination to break the silence in their advocacy. These acts are deeply anti-democratic. And we ask that the Seattle City council ensure safe access for all so this ordinance can pass as swiftly as possible.

As Seattle begins to ensure accountability for the discrimination and harassment that caste-oppressed Seattle citizens and workers face within the city, it is imperative to continue the path forward by ratifying and implementing caste protections as quickly as possible, given the grave complaints of caste oppressed stakeholders.

Any attempt to derail this ordinance by opponents to caste equity would harm Seattle workers and would undermine the legally guaranteed, democratic processes of civil and workers rights . Workers often face attacks for their organizing on behalf of their workplace and civil rights, and while we are dismayed at the attacks that caste-oppressed workers and students have faced, we believe that their courage and their foundation in the law will ultimately bear fruit. We strongly believe that attempts to discredit these vulnerable stakeholders and their demands for equity and safety are rooted in casteism and make it even clearer that these institutional protections are imperative to ensuring equity. In the United States, one's future should not be determined by the family you are born into. The oppression of caste goes against the very principles and ideals on which this country was founded.

For this reason we believe that it is significant for both civil and workers' rights that Seattle leads the nation and passes this historical ordinance. Including caste as a protected category is in line with other institutions who have added caste including Cal State University System, Brown, Brandeis, and Colby college as well as academic union contracts, such as the one passed by the California Faculty Union, Harvard Graduate Student Union, and many ongoing collective bargaining projects underway. We urge you to pass this resolution immediately and thank you again for your courage in standing with caste-oppressed workers and moving Seattle as a leader in diversity and inclusion in the nation.

Sincerely,

APALA Seattle
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO