

Subject: Stand for Human Rights: Vote Yes to Ban Caste-Based Discrimination
Date: Wednesday, February 15, 2023 at 9:33:47 AM Pacific Standard Time
From: CAR Organizer <campaignagainstracism@equalhealth.org>
To: LEG_CouncilMembers <council@seattle.gov>
CC: Stone, Meredith <Meredith.Stone@seattle.gov>

CAUTION: External Email

Dear Council members,

I write to you as program manager of Equal Health's Campaign Against Racism with more than 1500 members and supporters.

On January 24, Tuesday, Councilmember Kshama Sawant (District 3, Central Seattle) introduced an ordinance <todo: enter Bill number when ready> to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle. I am writing in support of the ordinance, to urge your support and vote to pass the first-in-the-nation legislation to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle.

The caste system is practiced by many from the South Asian American community. The distressing tale of illegal sex, labor, and human trafficking of "lower caste" Indian girls to the US from 1986 to 2000 in the United States^[1] ^[2] v. Lakireddy Bali Reddy and the ongoing lawsuit against technology giant Cisco in California are two extreme examples, cut across decades, of caste-based discrimination and the role caste plays in the South Asian diaspora in the United States. Research by Equality Labs and testimonies collected by Ambedkar King Study Circle exhibit that people from the "lower castes" are discriminated against, harassed, and biased for their caste in, but not limited to, workplace, housing, and employment in the country. The absence of a protection policy against caste-based discrimination has enabled and facilitated discrimination, exclusion, and exploitation of those born into the "lower castes".

Seattle is a city in which South Asians are the fastest-growing ethnic group. A 2022 article noted, "Seattle is one of the cities where caste discrimination *remains a largely hidden and unreported issue.*" The same article quotes a spokesperson from the City of Seattle Office of Civil Rights, who wrote that "*Caste Status is not a recognized protected class in the City of Seattle and if our office were to receive a complaint based solely on caste discrimination, we would not be able to investigate it...*" The legislation introduced by Councilmember Sawant will ban caste discrimination and the protection policies will bring visibility to, and address this "hidden and unreported issue". This legislation will ensure that "caste" is explicitly enshrined as a prohibited basis of discrimination and necessary protections are in place in Seattle for caste-oppressed South Asian residents, workers, and visitors, who, at present, have no legal remedies.

Brandeis University, California State University (CSU), Harvard Graduate Students

Union-United Auto Workers (UAW), Brown University, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), AFL-CIO, and the California Democratic Party are some of the names in the growing list of institutions that have endorsed caste equity and added caste to their non-discriminatory policies.

I urge you all to support Councilmember Kshama Sawant's legislation to ban caste discrimination. Your vote to outlaw caste discrimination will ensure legal protections for the caste-discriminated, reaffirm Seattle's commitment to recognizing the dignity of all its residents, workers, and visitors that does not subject them to prejudicial treatment, bias, and discrimination, and set a precedent for the whole nation.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Equal Health 's Campaign Against Racism
