

Subject: Ban caste based discrimination

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From: Gitika Talwar <gitika.talwar@gmail.com>

To: LEG_CouncilMembers <council@seattle.gov>

CAUTION: External Email

To,

Members of Seattle City Council

I am writing in support of legislation to ban caste-based discrimination in Seattle.

I am writing in my capacity as a Community-Clinical Psychologist who serves the student community at University of Washington-Seattle. I am also a first-generation immigrant from India, a Hindu and a practising Buddhist. As someone from the middle-castes, I have benefitted greatly from caste privilege without knowing it. Which is a classic case of privilege as an invisible knapsack. I have gone through life in India thinking patriarchy was my biggest challenge and upon moving to the U.S. I thought Xenophobia and the ideology of white supremacy was my biggest challenge. However, now I also recognize how skillfully Hindu scriptures were politically weaponized to justify dehumanization of people based on their birth into "lower" castes (better verbalized as a oppressed castes).

Through years of work with the South Asian community, I recognize the indelible impact of caste oppression on folks who identify as Dalit. I have known how upper-caste communities continue to invalidate Dalit struggles and continue outright oppression by opposing Dalit efforts to fight discrimination. Upper-caste notions of impurity and dehumanization of Dalits is extremely nuanced and can be invisible to the untrained eye (i.e. non-South Asian folks and also caste-privileged folks unfamiliar with caste oppression), which is why is very very important for the Seattle City Council to take the lead on banning discrimination based on Caste. Explicitly naming this will help folks who experience caste discrimination in Seattle to seek redressal of their grievances if caste-oppression occurs.

banning caste-based discrimination is an additive measure, it adds to existing protections based on race, gender, national origins, etc

It is extremely important to not allow Hindu nationalists or upper caste Hindus to allow the dangerous weaponization of our ancient scriptures by allowing the silencing or the harassment of Dalit kin. Don't allow them to proclaim that caste protections are casteist -- that is like saying race protections are racist or gender-based protections are misogynist. And if scriptures are used to justify mistreating other humans, it is important that our City officials step into to protect people -- misguided 'cultural freedom' arguments cannot be used to clamp down on human safety and dignity.

Thank you for your time,

Gitika

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When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid. - Audre Lorde