



Dear Councilmembers,

We, the co-chairs of India Civil Watch International, a human rights monitoring and advocacy group based in North America with over 120 members, are writing with reference to the ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination introduced by Councilmember Kshama Sawant (District 3).

As a human rights monitoring group, we at ICWI know intimately the scourge of caste-based discrimination, exploitation, violence, and sexual violence in India. The toll that this violence, committed by dominant caste groups upon oppressed caste groups, is horrific and continues to this day. The caste system is deeply entrenched in the social lives and psyche of communities across South Asia. As a system, it infiltrates into the most basic of human relations, from relations of labor (with caste-based restrictions on professions) to intimate relations (with prohibitions against intercaste marriages, reinforced by innumerable “honor killings”). Dominant caste groups routinely subject oppressed caste groups to humiliation, ostracization, and negative stereotyping.

Unfortunately, as with other deeply entrenched social and psychological structures, casteism is not easily gotten rid of, and travels with people across borders. As the South Asian community grows in size in the United States, we are starting to see more and more examples of this odious and historic form of oppression coming to the US as well. From caste categories in [dating apps](#), to caste-based organizations that exclude people from historically oppressed castes, to proposals for [gated communities](#) (“Agraharams”) where only members of a dominant caste can buy homes, to the exploitation of workers from oppressed caste groups through [forced labor](#), to emails sent out to mailing lists exhorting managers to not hire workers from oppressed caste groups, we are seeing numerous and concerning examples of caste-based discrimination right here in the US.

Given the rising population of South Asians in Seattle, and the fact that caste status is not recognized as a protected class, and therefore the system as it exists is not equipped to deal with caste-based harms in the United States, we are encouraged by the introduction of this proposed legislation. We hope that you will recognize this growing threat to values of equality and nondiscrimination, and take action now by passing this ordinance. We need this recognition to travel across the United States, and key universities and unions have led the way, including Brandeis University and California State University, and the Alphabet Union and the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA). We hope that, with the Seattle City Council taking action, this terrible form of exploitation by dominant caste groups can be challenged and defeated in the United States.

Yours sincerely,

Biju Mathew and Sirisha Naidu

Co-Chairs, India Civil Watch International