

Subject: Support the Ordinance to Stop caste based discrimination
Date: Thursday, February 16, 2023 at 1:31:18 PM Pacific Standard Time
From: Jasmit Singh <singh.jasmit@gmail.com>
To: LEG_CouncilMembers <council@seattle.gov>
CC: seattleindians@gmail.com <seattleindians@gmail.com>

CAUTION: External Email

Dear Members of the Seattle Council:

I am writing to urge you to support the Ordinance banning Caste-Based Discrimination, without adding any amendments to weaken its impact and intent.

Khalsa Gurmat Center is a non-profit community organization that has been working with parents and children in the Sikh community on issues of education, empowerment, and engagement for the past decade. One of the things we have focussed on with the youth is to secure justice and fair treatment for all people. We recognize the importance of comprehensive laws prohibiting discrimination.

As the South Asian community has grown both in size and influence in Seattle, it has brought traditions and practices from home countries - some good and some bad. One of them is the practice of Caste discrimination which is pervasive in its ugliest form in these countries even today [1], despite the extensive protections in the Indian Constitution that were incorporated in 1950 [2]. Even though the same form of physical abuse may not be prevalent in the US, the undercurrent of mental abuse and discrimination persist in education, housing, public spaces, and employment.

It is important for us to note that we believe deeply in the religious freedom that is mandated to every US citizen by the First Amendment. However, we believe that this should not be used as an instrument to thwart anti-discrimination laws or violate the civil rights or the dignity of others. The ordinance is not intended to target a specific community or faith but to ensure that marginalized communities are not oppressed by those who are privileged.

The government has a clear responsibility to take firm action against discrimination, and this ordinance is an appropriate step in fulfilling that responsibility. It is a historic opportunity for the city to ensure that everyone can live their lives with dignity and respect.

Sincerely,

Jasmit Singh
Executive Director
Khalsa Gurmat Center
Federal Way, WA

[1] 2022: A Look back at hate crimes against Dalits and Adivasis
<https://cjp.org.in/2022-a-look-back-at-hate-crimes-against-dalits-and-advasis/>

[2] Human Rights Abuses of Dalits in India
<https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1486&context=hrbrief>