

Subject: Legislation to ban caste-based discrimination
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To: LEG_CouncilMembers <council@seattle.gov>
CC: Stone, Meredith <Meredith.Stone@seattle.gov>, Sawant, Kshama <Kshama.Sawant@seattle.gov>

CAUTION: External Email

Dear members of the Seattle City Council,

I write as a resident of Seattle, a scholar of India, and a member of the South Asian-American diaspora to express my strong support for the proposed legislation banning discrimination on the basis of caste in Seattle. The explicit inclusion of caste as a category covered by the city's anti-discrimination policy will strengthen ongoing efforts to make Seattle a safer, more equitable and inclusive space for all its residents, a group that includes a large number of people from South Asia.

As numerous scholarly studies and personal testimonies have painstakingly documented, caste-based inequality, marginalization, and oppression is an integral part of the everyday experience of people who have inherited ancestral membership of castes that have historically been deemed "lower" by dominant caste groups. This stigma and discrimination has long-lasting, deleterious effects on oppressed caste individuals' [physical](#) and [mental](#) health as well as their access to and success in education and employment. This is true not just in South Asia, but also in diasporic South Asian communities across the world, including in the United States. For example, in a moving testimony of the caste-based discrimination he had faced when seeking employment in the United States, Prem Pariyar, a Dalit individual from Nepal, noted that he had to "[endure the same discrimination and exclusion he faced in his home country](#)" in the Bay Area. As a recent case against Cisco in a California Court (and the various Dalit testimonies that accompanied it) further demonstrated, discrimination by dominant castes against oppressed castes is ongoing in the American workplace. Adding caste to existing anti-discrimination laws will extend and deepen their impact, and offer more meaningful protection to members of oppressed-caste groups who have struggled to make their experiences of caste-based discrimination legible in the United States. The fact that several institutions, including Brandeis University, the California State University system, and the NAACP, have recently added caste to their non-discrimination policies speaks to the national momentum around this issue, and makes Seattle's impending move to ban discrimination on the basis of caste all the more urgent and historic.

Those who oppose such legislation often do so on the grounds that it is 'Hinduphobic' and will increase racial and religious discrimination against Hindus. However, many of the individuals who have experienced caste discrimination are themselves [Hindu](#); in fact, they experience a 'double discrimination' being not just members of racially minoritized groups but also oppressed caste groups. Further, as numerous sociological studies have shown, caste discrimination is present not just in Hinduism, but also in other South Asian religions, including [Islam](#) and [Christianity](#). The claim that explicitly banning discrimination on the basis of caste targets Hindus and Hinduism does not account for these broader realities.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my support for the Seattle City Council's historic move to ban discrimination on the basis of caste ancestry. This is a crucial step in making our city a safer and more inclusive place, and deserves widespread support.

Thank you for your time and efforts.

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