

South Asian Behavioral Health Initiative of the Pacific Northwest
c/o Nidhi Berry

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www.sabhipnw.com



SABHI PNW

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Feb 16, 2023

Seattle City Council
PO Box 34025
Seattle
WA 98124-4025

Subject: Letter in Support of Ordinance to Ban Caste-based Discrimination in Seattle City

Dear Council Members:

We are the South Asian Behavioral Health Initiative, an organization founded in 2018. SABHI seeks to build community and connection for practicing South Asian therapists, to be a mental health resource for our communities in the Pacific Northwest, and to destigmatize South Asian mental wellness via the visibility of our stories and expertise. As an organization, we promote collective liberation, which we define as an understanding that without the liberation of those who are Dalit, queer, trans, and most impacted by colorism, we cannot all be free. We are not an insulated group; we acknowledge and hold ourselves accountable to the idea that our liberation is inextricably tied to the liberation of the oppressed, within our communities and with those in non-South Asian communities.

As a collective, we write today to give our full support to enacting the first-ever ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination.

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Mental wellness is not solely linked to a person's neurochemistry or biological makeup; it cannot and should not be divorced from our larger societal and political context. Simply put, oppression in all forms deleteriously impacts mental health—and caste-based oppression is no exception. Although caste-based discrimination historically has been a South Asian issue, it's now a global and U.S. issue, given the numbers of South Asian immigrants across the world in positions of authority, including in our Pacific Northwest communities.

As mental health professionals, we have visibility into how caste-based oppression impacts our clients' lives, including trauma, lowered self-esteem, and struggles with depression and anxiety, increased risk of suicide. Caste oppression is a hidden risk factor in the health of South Asian communities. As mental health professionals, we can see how incidents of structural oppression, including casteism, could be addressed by enacting explicit legislation. Anti-casteism legislation is crucial for advocating and protecting people in our communities. Dedicated to our clients' holistic well-being, we fully support an ordinance that protects our Dalit siblings.

In recent years, as our South Asian communities have become more and more vocal about our solidarity with civil rights movements in the U.S., including Black Lives Matter, there have been fair reminders that we should also reflect internally on South Asian culturally-sanctioned forms of segregation, dehumanization, and oppression. Acknowledging the trauma of caste has felt necessary for us to be genuine in our calls for equity and the abolition of oppressive ideologies.

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We are grateful for the advocacy and work of Equality Labs and stand proudly with their efforts to enact this measure. As mental health professionals, we call on Seattle City Council to be on the right side of justice and ensure that all people feel safe, welcome, and valued. We hope this Council will lead the country toward liberation for all.

Sincerely,

The South Asian Behavioral Health Initiative of the Pacific Northwest (SABHI PNW)

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