

February 17, 2023

Seattle City Council  
PO Box 94728, Seattle, WA, 98124-4728  
Council@seattle.gov

Dear Honorable Members of the Seattle City Council,

My name is Elisa Batista, and I am campaign director with the gender justice organization UltraViolet Action (WeAreUltraViolet.org). While we are a national organization with 1.2 million members across the United States, hundreds of our members reside in Seattle, Washington.

We are writing to you in strong support of the ordinance introduced by Councilmember Sawant to ban caste-based discrimination by adding caste as a legally protected category.

Caste is a system of religiously codified oppression that affects over 1 billion people across the world. With over 167,000 people from South Asia living in Washington – and largely concentrated in the Greater Seattle area – this is an issue that directly affects each of your constituencies.

Caste discrimination occurs in the form of social segregation, economic deprivation, physical and psychological abuse, and violence. It also manifests in employment, education, and housing, where caste-oppressed people have some of the highest rates of discrimination in the U.S. among Asian Americans: 1 in 4 facing physical and verbal assault; 1 in 3 facing educational discrimination; and 2 in 3 facing workplace discrimination.

Unfortunately, this violence has now extended to proponents of Councilmember Sawant's ordinance. Over the last several weeks, we've learned of many leaders within the South Asian community who are now receiving rape threats, death threats, attempts to out their identities, workplace investigations, and other forms of intimidation after expressing support for this measure.

We ask the Seattle City Council to stand with caste-oppressed communities and their allies and pass the caste ordinance to not only protect the civil rights of caste-oppressed people but also, the safety of those individuals who are simply engaged in the democratic process of organizing for their rights.

It is for these reasons that UltraViolet Action supports Councilmember Sawant's ordinance and is asking for your 'yes' vote to ensure discrimination on the basis of caste is not only illegal, but will be properly enforced throughout the city.

The rest of the country is counting on you to do the right thing! Please help us make history in Seattle by becoming the first city in the country to ban caste discrimination. Do not hesitate to reach out to me with any comments or questions.

Thank you,

Elisa Batista  
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UltraViolet Action  
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