

Subject: Stand for Human Rights. Vote Yes on ordinance to Ban Caste-Based Discrimination
Date: Sunday, February 12, 2023 at 11:26:22 AM Pacific Standard Time
From: Vik Bahl <vbahl2@yahoo.com>
To: LEG_CouncilMembers <council@seattle.gov>
CC: Stone, Meredith <Meredith.Stone@seattle.gov>

CAUTION: External Email

February 12, 2023

Dear Councilmembers,

I am Professor Vivek Bahl, Ph.D., English Faculty, Green River College, Auburn, WA. I write to you today seeking your support for the Seattle City Council's proposed ordinance to ban caste-based discrimination in the City of Seattle. I stand in solidarity with South Asian and other immigrant community members and all working people.

Caste is a systematic method of marginalization and exploitation of groups of people based on their birth. In its discriminatory characteristics, caste shares a lot in common with race. In fact, oppressed caste people in our South Asian diaspora face double discrimination owing to their intersectionality of being one marginalized minority within another.

While caste originated in and is still most prevalent in South Asia, decades of South Asian migration into America have, as would be expected, ensured the equally successful migration of the caste system and caste-based discrimination as well. Organized demands to redress egregious caste-based discrimination in the US are rising, such as the ongoing [lawsuit against technology giant Cisco](#) case, [United States v. Lakireddy Bali Reddy](#) case, [the BAPS case](#), to name a few.

The stories from the subsequent testimonies from witnesses and survivors of caste-based discrimination (collected by [Ambedkar King Study Circle](#) and [Equality Labs](#)) tell us of an urgent need to protect this axis of discrimination. Existing legal protections are inadequate to protect caste-based discrimination given the victim's intersectionality of marginalization and that their discrimination happens at the hands of the people of their same race.

Contrarian views would hold that such a law would be anti-Hindu. Nothing could be further from the truth - caste cuts across religions and the protection would apply to oppressed castes of Hindus and non-Hindus alike. Another contrarian claim is that such a law would unfairly target Indian or South Asian communities. This is also not valid as it would be like saying that sexual discrimination laws unfairly target men or that transgender protection laws unfairly target cisgendered people.

Seattle has the fastest growing South Asian population of any city in America, and consequently is the city that most needs this law to protect more of its citizens. With this law, Seattle would be honoring its commitment to its residents, workers, and visitors, many of whom are minority South Asian caste-oppressed people who don't have legal protections. It would be setting a precedent for the rest of the nation to follow.

I urge all members of the City Council to join Councilmember Kshama Sawant in prohibiting caste-based discrimination in Seattle. Seattle will become the first city in the nation to outlaw caste discrimination and will have rippling repercussions across the United States to make caste a protected category.

Thank you,

Vivek Bahl, Ph.D.
vbahl2@yahoo.com