

February 16, 2023

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

Dear Seattle City Council Members,

We are [South Asian SOAR](#), a national collective of South Asian survivors of gender-based violence and community-based survivor-serving organizations. Our network of over 30 organizations in the United States works towards ending and preventing gender-based violence and supporting the healing and leadership of survivors and allies. We generate community-based research, data, and stories about gender-based violence to drive cultural and systemic change towards communities free of all forms of violence.

In our recent research report, [Together We Rise](#), one of our ten key findings is that oppressed and underserved South Asian survivors, specifically caste-oppressed survivors, face the greatest barriers to accessing services, justice, and safety. It is with this knowledge and in this capacity that we are writing now in support of the powerful new ordinance by councilmember Kshama Sawant that would add caste to the city's anti-discrimination policies. This historic resolution is a necessary next step to address the serious experiences of discrimination, including by employers and in workplaces, that caste oppressed Americans report across the United States.

Caste is a system of religiously codified oppression that affects over 1 billion people across the world. Practices of exclusion based on one's caste status limit access to resources like education and employment. 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.

Through research, education, and advocacy, South Asian SOAR's partners organizations like Equality Labs and API Chaya have been at the forefront of the fight to address caste discrimination in the U.S. as well as advocate for gender, sexual, and religious minority communities in the South Asian diaspora.

In doing this work, they face violence stemming from ancestral and multigenerational histories of caste apartheid as well as contemporary forms of discrimination. At South Asian SOAR, we know the harm that comes when survivors are gaslit about their experiences of violence. That is why we stand unapologetically with the survivor leaders of Equality Labs, API Chaya, and all of the other survivor leaders driving this campaign and urge the council not to undermine their advocacy by giving heed to those that would try to dismiss their legitimate research and organizing. If we have learned anything from the 'MeToo' movement, it is that we must listen to survivors now more than ever. We urge you to stand with Equality Labs and all the Dalit Civil Rights groups braving rape threats, death threats, attempts to out their identities, workplace investigations, and more violent activity for simply organizing for our rights in the face of unyielding caste violence and discrimination in the U.S. today.

That is why we ask the Seattle City council to stand with caste-oppressed communities and their allies and vote yes on the caste ordinance as swiftly as possible to ensure that Seattle is a welcoming city for all.

Thank you for your attention and action,

Amrita Doshi

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amrita Doshi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Executive Director
South Asian SOAR
amrita@southasiansoar.org