
From: Venkataraman, Asha
Sent: Monday, February 20, 2023 1:41 PM
To: Venkataraman, Asha
Subject: RE: Legislation prohibiting discrimination by caste FW: Please Vote NO for Proposed Caste Ordinance in Seattle based on Racist and Faulty Data

From: Debadutta Dash <dash.wasitrac@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 7, 2023 8:42 PM
To: Juarez, Debora <Debora.Juarez@seattle.gov>; Herbold, Lisa <Lisa.Herbold@seattle.gov>; Lewis, Andrew <Andrew.Lewis@seattle.gov>; Morales, Tammy <Tammy.Morales@seattle.gov>; Mosqueda, Teresa <Teresa.Mosqueda@seattle.gov>; Nelson, Sara <Sara.Nelson@seattle.gov>; Pedersen, Alex <Alex.Pedersen@seattle.gov>; Strauss, Dan <Dan.Strauss@seattle.gov>
Cc: info-wasitrac <info@wasitrac.org>
Subject: Please Vote NO for Proposed Caste Ordinance in Seattle based on Racist and Faulty Data

CAUTION: External Email

February 7, 2023

Honorable Seattle City Council Members Sara Nelson, Teresa Mosqueda, Andrew Lewis, Dan Strauss, Debora Juarez, Alex Pedersen, Tammy Morales, and Lisa Herbold,

Greetings from the Washington State and India Trade Relations Action Committee (WASITRAC)! We are a Seattle based non-profit advocacy group engaged for a strong Washington State-India bilateral trade relations and cultural understanding since 2010. You will be please to know that the year 2023 will be a momentous year, the 75th year of US-India diplomatic relationship. We are confident that the ties between the world's largest and oldest democracies will determine the future of technology and innovation.

However, I write to you expressing our severe concerns about Councilwoman Kshama Sawant's recent ordinance to ban alleged caste discrimination in Seattle and urge you to vote against it. As written, the ordinance advances nothing but bigotry against the South Asian community by using racist, colonial tropes of "caste." We are dismayed to see the blatant singling out of a minority community based on nothing but unsubstantiated claims based on faulty data from hate groups.

Below are some important reasons why you should **VOTE NO** for this ordinance.

1. **The ordinance is heavily dependent on data and surveys supplied by hate groups such as Equality Labs and the Ambedkar King Study Circle who are known for their bigotry against the Hindu American community - openly calling for the faith to be dismantled and publicly calling millions of Hindus as "rapists" simply due to their birth and advocating for a dismantling of the Hindu religion. In March 2020, Equality Labs attacked the extremely popular Hindu festival of Holi by falsely claiming that the festival celebrates the burning of a "low caste" woman and where men advance violence against women, including throwing semen.1 Such hate should not be mainstreamed by a city as committed to diversity as Seattle is.**
2. **Faulty data. There are several well documented problems with the Equality Labs "survey" as laid out in various articles.2 Indeed, the quality and data of this report were challenged comprehensively back in 20183 when it was first distributed. More recently, a 2020 survey on Indian Americans by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace called out the the survey's flaws in Footnote 29, indicating the following (emphasis added):4 This study relied on a nonrepresentative snowball sampling method to recruit respondents. Furthermore, respondents who did not disclose a caste identity were dropped from the data set. Therefore, it is likely that the sample does not fully represent the South Asian American population and could skew in favor**

of those who have strong views about caste. While the existence of caste discrimination in India is incontrovertible, its precise extent and intensity in the United States can be contested.

3. **There is no substantial evidence of any caste based discrimination in Seattle. Should the city be expending valuable resources and embroiling itself in potential litigation for something that doesn't exist, given the myriad problems that the city needs to tackle right now, such as homelessness,⁵ violent crimes⁶ and growing layoffs?**
4. **The fact that a commission would be set up to monitor discrimination based on caste is itself discriminatory in nature because it subjects only one group ("South Asians") to special monitoring. It creates the false idea that South Asians require "special monitoring" beyond existing laws and that they are inherently MORE prone to discriminate than others, thereby violating their rights to equal protection and due process under both the US Constitution and Washington State law.**
5. **There are thousands of "castes" and social groupings within South Asia. Many vary based on the different states or provinces within each of the eight countries. How does the Seattle City Council plan to adjudicate these complaints or determine someone's caste? Any litigation around caste discrimination will come up against strict guidelines set by the Supreme Court for Title VII claims⁷ subjecting the city to costly litigation and legal imbroglio. In fact, such an experiment is a stark reminder of the racist and colonial policy implemented by the British to rule Indians and advance their inherent prejudice against the native "savage" population.**
6. **The ordinance claims that "caste" is a hereditary system sanctioned by law or religion. There is no such law in the world, and certainly not in South Asia, which sanctions "caste" discrimination. In addition, there is no religion in South Asia that officially sanctions such discrimination. In fact, the very word "caste" is derived from the Portuguese "casta" and has no precedent in any South Asian system.**
7. **Furthermore, the ordinance cites the Cisco lawsuit by California Department of Civil Rights. The Council should pause and consider how an allegation that has not even been proven after close to 3 years, is counted as "evidence," not just against the individuals involved, but against the entire community they hail from? This assumption of guilty unless proven innocent contravenes our fundamental principles of justice.**
8. **The CSU policy cited as evidence/precedence has already resulted in a lawsuit being filed against the university. Brown University, in enacting a similar rule, admitted that "existing laws are sufficient to handle discrimination based on Caste." Brandeis University has not recorded a single case of caste based discrimination in the three years since caste was added as a protected category on its campus. The facts directly contradict the exaggerated claims that caste based discrimination is widespread, rampant and an urgent problem that must be addressed with this ordinance.**

We strongly condemn all forms of discrimination, including caste-based discrimination, and firmly believe that there is no place for prejudice and mistreatment of anyone in our diverse and pluralistic society. Fortunately, federal and state law protect against caste discrimination under the existing categories of national origin and ancestry, both of which have been interpreted as inclusive of the various characteristics that might be associated with caste such as ancestry (lineage), birthplace, culture, ethnicity, or language.

As such, we again strongly urge you to not to adopt any policies or resolutions that would unfairly target the Hindu American community and people of South Asian descent or origin, subject them to additional scrutiny, leave them vulnerable to bullying in schools, and deprive them of their fundamental civil rights in the workplace or elsewhere. Forcing people into caste buckets is exactly the action that was taken by the colonial British in India to divide her people. **This ordinance will repeat that horror and create and perpetuate divisions within the South Asian community.**

We urge the Council to Vote NO.

References:

1. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200306101500/https://medium.com/@EqualityLabs/why-do-we-say-no-to-holi-a-guide-to-challenge-casteism-ad592d0735cb>
2. <https://medium.com/@rachelgotham5/equality-labs-caste-report-a-rebuttal-to-a-british-colonial-narrative-replayed-1676068ee2cf>
3. https://www.indiaabroad.com/reconciliation-or-reconciliation/article_ad5cea31-1739-5105-9254-2d4ff29eece5.html
4. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/06/09/social-realities-of-indian-americans-results-from-2020-indian-american-attitudes-survey-pub-84667>

5. <https://www.axios.com/local/seattle/2022/12/21/washington-state-homelessness-2022>
 6. <https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/2021-report-identifies-seattles-crime-hot-spots-shows-14-year-high-violent-crimes/NNXQBYYRLRE35EXFHCLYSOVKUU/>
 7. University of Texas Southwestern Medical Ctr. v. Nassar, No. 12-484 (June 24, 2013)
- Thank you for your consideration on this important matter.

Debadutta Dash

Co-Chair

Washington State and India Trade Relations Action Committee (WASITRAC)

CIBER Adv. Board, Foster School of Business, Univ. of Washington.

info@wasitrac.org

206-330-8512