

Seattle City Council Approves First-in-the-U.S. Ban on Caste Discrimination

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Seattle has become the first U.S. city to [approve legislation](#) amending city ordinances to prohibit discrimination on the basis of “caste,” including in the context of employment. The proposals now go before the mayor for signature.

The legislative push was largely driven by discrimination-related concerns with respect to Seattle’s South Asian population. The term “caste” is defined broadly for purposes of the amendments as “a system of rigid social stratification characterized by hereditary status, endogamy, and social barriers sanctioned by custom, law, or religion.”

Under the amendments, which are broadly written, it would be an unlawful discriminatory practice for Seattle employers to:

- print, circulate, or cause to be printed, published, or circulated, any statement, advertisement, or publication relating to employment, or to use any form of application for employment, that indicates any preference, limitation, specification, or discrimination based upon caste; or
- engage in any act, by itself or as part of a practice, and including harassment, that is intended to or results in different treatment or differentiates between or among individuals or groups of individuals by reason of caste.

It would also be unlawful under the amendments for any person to discriminate in a place of public accommodation (including retail establishments, restaurants, medical offices, entertainment venues, and more) by “harassing, intimidating, or otherwise abusing any person or person’s friends or associates” because of caste.

Employers and public accommodations with operations or personnel in Seattle should take note of this development and review their policies and practices for compliance.

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