

VANDERBILT STUDENT GOVERNMENT
RESOLUTION SUPPORTING BANNING CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION IN THE VANDERBILT
NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

RESOLUTION S: 22-23-11

PROPOSED BY: OUTREACH CO-CHAIR FOR SOUTH ASIAN CULTURAL EXCHANGE MIN KALASIKAM, OUTREACH CO-CHAIR FOR SOUTH ASIAN CULTURAL EXCHANGE GAYATRI ALURI, PRESIDENT FOR HIDDEN DORES INDUJA KUMAR, SPEAKER OF THE SENATE ANGELA YAN, STUDENT BODY VICE PRESIDENT ARI SASSON

COSPONSORED BY: ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND ISLAMIC TRADITIONS OF SOUTH ASIA ANAND V. TANEJA, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ASIAN STUDIES (SOUTH ASIA) MABEL GERGAN, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AKSHYA SAXENA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY SAMIRA SHEIKH, SENIOR LECTURER IN ASIAN STUDIES ELLIOTT MCCARTER, SENIOR LECTURER IN ASIAN STUDIES DIVYA CHAUDHRY, NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW ERIC GUREVITCH, PRESIDENT FOR VANDY KARMA (HINDU ORGANIZATION) JEEVAN RAJKUMAR, CO-PRESIDENT FOR SOUTH ASIAN CULTURAL EXCHANGE RIYA CHINNI, CO-PRESIDENT FOR SOUTH ASIAN CULTURAL EXCHANGE ANANYA SAGAR, PRESIDENT FOR MULTICULTURAL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL SAFA SHAHZAD, PRESIDENT FOR VANDERBILT INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ASSOCIATION CHANDLER QUAILE, PRESIDENT FOR INDIGENOUS SCHOLARS ORGANIZATION ANNABELLE LITTLEJOHN-BAILEY, PRESIDENT FOR VANDERBILT PRISON PROJECT SRIYA NEMANI, CAMPAIGNS CHAIR FOR VANDERBILT PRISON PROJECT AADITI LELE, PRESIDENT FOR AFRICAN STUDENT UNION VANESSA AJEH, PRESIDENT FOR DORES IN SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE LAITH KAYAT, INDIGENOUS STUDENTS ORGANIZATION BOARD MEMBER SHALINI THINAKARAN, PRESIDENT FOR NAACP ASYA MILES, VICE PRESIDENT FOR NAACP SYDNEY FEATHERSTONE, COMMUNITY SERVICE CHAIR FOR BLACK STUDENTS ASSOCIATION LESLEIGH TAYLOR, ADVOCACY CHAIR FOR SOUTH ASIAN CULTURAL EXCHANGE KRISH SHAH, MEDIA RELATIONS CO-CHAIR FOR SOUTH ASIAN CULTURAL EXCHANGE TRIAMBAKA SHRIRAM, COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR FOR SOUTH ASIAN CULTURAL EXCHANGE KAVI JAKES, HEAD OF RESEARCH FOR DORES SOLIDARITY NETWORK CHRISTINA JOHNSON, BOARD MEMBER FOR DORES SOLIDARITY NETWORK CONNOR WARMUTH

We, the elected representatives of the Vanderbilt Student Body, hereby enact the following:

WHEREAS, Caste is an ancient Indian social hierarchy system that sorted groups of people into four separate categories based on their occupational and religious duties at birth, allowing for no social mobility. To this day, it is a system that pervades South Asia and the diaspora and is not confined to India. At the bottom of this system are Dalits, workers who have historically been relegated to the most undesirable jobs in society¹; and,

WHEREAS, Caste is more of an “invisible” identity that cannot be identified by most Americans. However, to South Asian families, scholars, and students, caste can be determined by a person by even just looking at their last name. This can lead to discrimination against caste oppressed students in the form of slurs, microaggressions, and social exclusion²; and,

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/30/us/csu-caste-protections-universities-cec/index.html>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/30/us/csu-caste-protections-universities-cec/index.html>

WHEREAS, over 4.6 million South Asian Americans live in the US currently, with that number only being projected to grow over the next few decades³. Additionally, about 18.8% of Vanderbilt undergraduate students are Asian, with a significant portion of those students being South Asian Americans; thereby, caste discrimination is a problem that is heavily pertinent to the South Asian community at Vanderbilt⁴; and,

WHEREAS, Caste bias is becoming more of a prevalent problem as more and more South Asians immigrate to the US. This is exemplified by the caste bias discrimination case from Cisco that has advanced in the Courts in August 2022, illustrating a need to outlaw caste discrimination on every level of authority, including the federal level⁵; and,

WHEREAS, schools such as Harvard University, Brown University, University of California - Davis, and the California State system have banned caste discrimination in their non-discrimination policies. If Vanderbilt University were to follow, it would be the first University in the South to ban caste discrimination. This would allow students who feel they have experienced caste discrimination an opportunity to hold their aggressors accountable for their actions. This change would also demonstrate that Vanderbilt University supports and holds space for South Asian students, especially those who come from marginalized backgrounds; and,

WHEREAS, the Seattle City Council has voted to ban caste discrimination in the city⁶, making it the first U.S. city to outlaw caste discrimination, due to its prevalence in the country in the workplace and in spaces of education such as the University, and due to the high population of Indian Americans in the city. Given the fact that Tennessee is home to 12,835 Asian Indians, and the number of South Asian students at Vanderbilt, this undoubtedly must be addressed⁷; and,

WHEREAS, Cornel West, famed scholar of race relations in the U.S. has come out in support of banning caste discrimination in the United States saying “caste is an urgent issue ... in the U.S. and should be addressed immediately”. West said “Discrimination is evil be it racial or caste. And it is not complex in how you address [it]. You must act with your full legal authority to ban [it].” He urged Americans to “Learn the lesson from our shameful history of anti-blackness in the U.S. and do not repeat the failures of the past with my caste-oppressed kin.”⁸; therefore,

³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>

⁴ <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/about/quick-facts/>

⁵ <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/rare-caste-bias-case-advances-raising-calls-for-federal-action>

⁶ <https://www.npr.org/2023/02/22/1158687243/seattle-becomes-the-first-u-s-city-to-ban-caste-discrimination>

⁷

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/8265129.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

⁸

<https://council.seattle.gov/2023/02/16/letter-from-dr-cornel-west-i-am-writing-to-the-council-with-unapologetic-support-for-the-historic-ordinance-proposed-by-councilmember-kshama-sawant-to-ban-caste-based-discrimination/>

BE IT RESOLVED THAT, VSG respectfully recommends that Vanderbilt University's Non-Discrimination Policy⁹ be amended as follows:

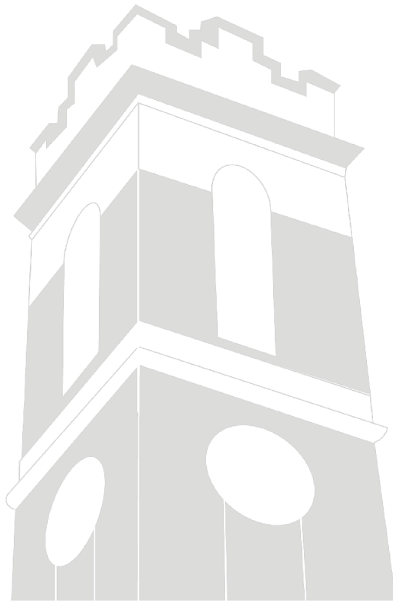
Vanderbilt University does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their race, sex, *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, military service, or genetic information, **and caste, which is protected under this policy**, in its administration of educational policies, programs, or activities; admissions policies; scholarship and loan programs; athletic or other University-administered programs; or employment. In addition, the University does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their **caste identity** consistent with the University's nondiscrimination policy.

Signed by the Speaker of the Senate,

Signed by the Student Body President,

Speaker Angela Yan

President Amisha Mittal



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