**Support for Anti-caste Proposal**

February

To the

Chancellor,

Vice Chancellor of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and the Chief Diversity Officer,

Provost,

We are writing to you as members of Progressive South Asians, UMass xxxxxxx to strongly encourage you to support a proposal that recognizes caste-based discrimination and adds it to the non-discrimination policy of UMass xxxxxxx. As students, we believe that we have a moral duty to support caste-oppressed people and to call on the University administration to offer institutional safeguards for so-called lower-caste people through this new protected category. The Massachusetts Society of Professors (MSP) recently endorsed this proposal, which requests the UMass administration to acknowledge the existence of discrimination and prejudice associated with caste in the United States (US) and to include caste as a protected category in the non-discrimination policy of the institution. This is an important step towards ending caste-based discrimination on this campus and safeguarding the rights of caste-oppressed people.

Caste-based discrimination is evident in US corporate and educational institutions. In 2018, a [survey by Equality Labs](https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey) (a US-based non-profit organization) found that 1 in 4 Dalit (stigmatized caste identity) Americans experienced verbal or physical assault because of their caste, and 1 in 3 Dalit students in the US reported experiencing discrimination during their education. Furthermore, 41 percent of Dalit students surveyed reported facing discrimination and microaggressions in US educational institutions as well as in the greater South Asian diaspora. Casteism in the US has been documented by several reputable media sources including [NPR](https://www.npr.org/2020/10/14/923736245/caste-arrives-in-silicon-valley), [The Atlantic,](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/11/india-america-caste/620583/) [Al Jazeera](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/12/15/it-is-time-to-talk-about-caste-in-pakistan-and-pakistani-diaspora) and [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/06/09/social-realities-of-indian-americans-results-from-2020-indian-american-attitudes-survey-pub-84667). This overwhelming body of evidence cannot be overlooked in good faith. In 2020, Isabel Wilkerson in her national bestseller book, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents,* highlights the need to make the fight against casteism a salient issue in institutional policies.

Much like racial justice, anti-caste intervention requires institutional support, and UMass xxxxxxx would not be alone in taking this much-needed step. Recently, [Brandeis University](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/12/20/university-adds-caste-nondiscrimination-policy), [University of California, Davis](https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/uc-davis-adds-caste-anti-discrimination-policy-81266137), [Colby College](https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2021/10/15/colby-college-bans-discrimination-based-caste), [Harvard University](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/harvard-adds-caste-bias-protections-graduate-student-workers-rcna7279) and [California State University](https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/group-opposes-protection-from-caste-discrimination-in-california-varsitys-faculty-union/article38319866.ece) (CSU) system (23 campuses across California state). explicitly acknowledged the importance of declaring caste-oppressed people as a protected group. This proposal will not result in discrimination against any group or South Asian communities but will instead extend the protection of rights for those who are not covered in the current non-discrimination policy of UMass xxxxxxx yet continues to face discrimination based on caste identities which have been imported from South Asia. We urge the leadership of UMass xxxxxxx to accept the proposal endorsed by the Massachusetts Society of Professors to join their sister institutes to fight against caste-based oppression and casteism in higher education. We also request the UMass leadership to listen to the voices of the caste-oppressed people and include caste-based discrimination in the campus climate assessment. We are optimistic that the UMass xxxxxxx leadership will work with us to set a historic precedent as the first public university on the east coast to add caste in its non-discrimination policy.

Thank you for your time, and for working to end discrimination on the UMass xxxxxxx campus. We urge the UMass xxxxxxx leadership to safeguard the rights of oppressed people and accept the proposal. We hope you will endorse this support letter to protect the rights of caste-oppressed people on this campus.

In solidarity,

Progressive xxxxx xxxxxxxx, UMass xxxxxxx

Graduate xxxxxxx, UMass xxxxxxx

xxxxxxx Senate, UMass xxxxxxx

Graduate xxxxxxx Association, UMass xxxxxxx