

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1578 (Jackson)

As Amended April 6, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires local and state officials to complete training related to antihate speech.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires, beginning on January 1, 2028, an employer that is a state agency or local agency to include anti-hate speech training as a component of the training and education required for sexual harassment for all elected state or local officials.
- 2) Specifies that a state or local official who serves more than one state agency or local agency shall only be required to receive training once every two years without regard to the number of state agencies or local agencies the official serves.
- 3) Provides that if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school district for those costs shall be made.

COMMENTS

- 1) *Commission on the State of Hate.* The Commission on the State of Hate (Commission) was established by AB 1126 (Bloom), Chapter 712, Statutes of 2021, at the Civil Rights Department (CRD) to assist the State of California with monitoring, preventing, and responding to hate. The Commission has three primary strategic goals:
 - a) Provide a comprehensive accounting of hate activity in California.
 - b) Develop recommendations for enhancing the resources and support for people and communities affected by hate.
 - c) Develop recommendations for reducing hate crimes.

According to the Commission's 2024-2025 Annual Report, "To identify key patterns and trends in hate in California, the Commission synthesized various sources, including unprecedented, publicly available data on Californians' experiences with hate – the 2023 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) dataset. Our findings from the CHIS dataset include:

- a) An estimated 8% of Californians over the age of 12 (nearly 2.6 million people) experienced at least one act of hate within a one-year period between 2022 and 2023.
- b) An estimated 15% of Californians (nearly 5 million people) witnessed an act of hate within the same period.
- c) Teens in California were more than twice as likely to experience hate than adults.
- d) Nearly 80% of teen victims of hate in California experienced hate at school.

- e) Nearly half (45%) of adult victims of hate in California experienced hate on a street or sidewalk, and more than one in three (34%) experienced hate at a business within the past year.
- f) Only about 0.3% of adults and 0.1% of adolescents who experienced hate-motivated physical violence or property damage are recorded in law enforcement data in California."

The report also describes the impact of hate on different groups and communities across the state. The 2023-2024 Annual Report made a number of recommendations, including recommendations for addressing hate against public officials and at public meetings. The recommendation stated, "Elected officials often undergo training after being sworn in or appointed. But this training does not always include information about how to address threats, harassment, and hate. Training and onboarding for officials should be expanded to include this. Trainings could range from helping officials prepare for the possibility of threats and harassment to information about how to respond to these incidents. Training could also consist of de-escalation training for use both during and outside of public meetings. Security and staff could also participate in de-escalation training."

- 2) *Current Training Requirements for Local Officials.* The California Constitution, and state law, including the Ralph M. Brown Act and the Political Reform Act, establish standards for the operations of the legislative bodies of local agencies. The Ralph M. Brown Act requires that legislative bodies of local agencies meet, deliberate, and vote in open session, with specified exceptions. The Political Reform Act prohibits local officials from participating in decisions which affect their material interests and establishes disclosure requirements.

In 2005, the Legislature enacted AB 1234 (Salinas), Chapter 700, Statutes of 2005, to require members of local agencies' legislative bodies to participate in ethics training, if those agencies offer compensation or expense reimbursement to their board members. AB 1234 required local agency officials to receive at least two hours of training in general ethics principles and ethics laws relevant to the official's public service every two years. Local agencies must maintain records on the dates local officials satisfied the training requirement and the entity that provided the training for at least five years. Such training is required to include, but is not limited to, the following information:

- a) Laws relating to personal financial gain by public servants, including, but not limited to, laws prohibiting bribery and conflict-of-interest laws.
- b) Laws relating to claiming prerequisites of office, including, but not limited to, gift and travel restrictions, prohibitions against the use of public resources for personal or political purposes, prohibitions against gifts of public funds, mass mailing restrictions, and prohibitions against acceptance of free or discounted transportation by transportation companies.
- c) Government transparency laws, including, but not limited to, financial interest disclosure requirements and open government laws.
- d) Laws relating to fair processes, including, but not limited to, common law bias prohibitions, due process requirements, incompatible offices, competitive bidding

requirements for public contracts, and disqualification from participating in decisions affecting family members.

AB 1661 (McCarty & Gonzalez), Chapter 816, Statutes of 2016, additionally required local agency officials to receive two hours of sexual harassment prevention training and education within the first six months of taking office or commencing employment, and every two years thereafter. The requirements of the bill apply only if a local agency provides any type of compensation, salary, or stipend to its local agency officials. AB 1661's requirements apply to any member of a legislative body and any elected official of cities and counties (including charter cities and charter counties), and special districts.

SB 827 (Gonzalez), Chapter 661, Statutes of 2025, added certain department heads or other similar administrative officers to the list of local officials that must complete the ethics training. SB 827 also required certain local agency officials to receive at least two hours of fiscal and financial training at least once every two years. The fiscal and financial training must include:

- a) Laws and principles relating to financial administration and short- and long-term fiscal management, including, but not limited to, the role and responsibilities of financial administration, financial policies, municipal budgets and budget processes and financial reporting and auditing.
 - b) Laws and principles relating to, but not limited to, capital financing and debt management, mechanisms for local agency revenues, pension and other postemployment benefits, cash management and investments, the prudent investor standard, and the ethics of safeguarding public resources.
 - c) General fiscal and financial planning principles and any pertinent laws relevant to the local agency official's public service and role in overseeing the local agency's operation and relevant to the local agency's procurement and contracting practices and responsibilities.
- 3) *Current Training Requirements for Elected State Officials.* California law requires elected state officials to complete an ethics training course within six months of being hired. For ongoing service, an elected official must complete the course once during each two-year period. The two-year period begins with an odd-numbered year, for example, 2017-18, 2019-20, etc. To help state officials meet this requirement, the Attorney General's Office and the Fair Political Practices Commission have developed the State Officials - Ethics Training Course. All other required training (sexual harassment prevention, violence prevention, and harassment, discrimination and retaliation prevention) is required by internal rules or employment laws, not a single statewide statute aimed specifically at state elected officials (like members of the Legislature).

According to the Author

"AB 1578 would require elected local and state officials to take one hour of anti-hate speech training every 4 years. This bill recognizes what too many Californians already know. Hate is not abstract. It shapes when people are safe, where they work, and how they move through their own communities. Hate speech from elected officials is the primary impetus of hate crimes. This bill takes the findings of the Commission on the State of Hate and turns them into action. We cannot claim to value equality while ignoring the systems that allow hate to persist. AB 1578 demands

that our state respond with clarity, data, and the courage to tell the truth about who is harmed and why. Justice begins with naming harm and building structures that prevent it."

Arguments in Support

According to Equality California, "Recent findings from the Commission on the State of Hate show that as many as 7% of California adults have experienced hate and 13% have witnessed it. These numbers are even higher for adolescents in the state, with 15% experiencing hate and 30% witnessing it."

"This rise in hate is occurring within a broader political climate where public officials increasingly use rhetoric that can reinforce harmful stereotypes and legitimize discrimination. Such rhetoric harms communities across California by further marginalizing individuals, undermining feelings of safety, and contributing to the conditions that can incite violence."

"Hate-based rhetoric from political leaders can embolden others to express and act on their prejudices. Conversely, responsible and inclusive leadership can help de-escalate tensions and reduce harmful attitudes. The words of public officials are not merely expressions of opinion—they shape social norms, influence behavior, and impact people's lived experiences."

"Recognizing and countering harmful rhetoric is essential to fostering a more inclusive and respectful California. AB 1578 takes an important step by equipping leaders with the tools to understand and address the impact of their words."

Arguments in Opposition

According to the California Family Council, "First, the bill fails to clearly define what constitutes 'hate speech.' Under AB 1578, state and local officials would be required to complete 'anti-hate speech' training without a clear statutory definition of the term. This ambiguity is troubling because it leaves the meaning of 'hate speech' open to interpretation by outside consultants or advocacy groups who may design and administer these training programs. Without clear limits, lawful and constitutionally protected viewpoints, especially religious or moral beliefs, could easily be mislabeled as 'hate.' "

"Experience in other countries demonstrates how broadly such policies can expand once implemented. In Finland, Member of Parliament Päivi Räsänen faced years of legal harassment for publicly expressing her biblical beliefs about marriage and sexuality. Likewise, the European Union's Digital Services Act pressures online platforms to suppress lawful speech under the banner of combating 'hate.' These examples illustrate a troubling pattern: regulations intended to target genuine threats often expand to encompass moral disagreement, religious conviction, and dissent from prevailing cultural views. "

"Second, this bill risks weaponizing government training against people of faith and other ideological minorities. Public officials in California hold a wide range of deeply held religious and philosophical beliefs. Mandatory ideological training that frames certain viewpoints, particularly traditional religious beliefs about marriage, sexuality, or gender, as inherently hateful would stigmatize these individuals and undermine the pluralism that our constitutional system is designed to protect."

"Finally, AB 1578 opens the door to compelled ideological instruction. The bill provides no meaningful guidance regarding who will design the training curriculum or what standards will govern it. As a result, the content will likely be shaped by outside advocacy organizations with

particular political perspectives. When the government requires officials to participate in training that promotes one worldview while labeling dissenting viewpoints as harmful or hateful, it creates pressure for ideological conformity rather than fostering genuine civil discourse."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) One-time General Fund (GF) costs of an absorbable amount to the Civil Rights Department (CRD) in staff workload to update required harassment training course content, related website resources (such as a fact sheet, poster, and frequently asked questions for employers and employees), and regulations. Additionally, one-time costs of approximately \$35,000 to CRD in vendor contract payments to translate the updated training content into five languages, including the creation of voice files and related website resources.
- 2) Costs of an unknown, but potentially absorbable amount, across the state as an employer, to the extent a state agency must update its sexual harassment training program to include an anti-hate speech training component for elected officials (General Fund or special fund).
- 3) Costs to affected local agencies of an unknown amount, potentially in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars statewide, to the extent a local agency must update its sexual harassment training program to include an anti-hate speech training component for elected officials. These costs are likely reimbursable by the state General Fund (GF), subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

Based on prior commission findings, the mandate does not likely apply to training provision but likely applies to other eligible administrative expenses incurred by local entities. Reimbursement would be available to only general law counties and certain special districts subject to specified provisions of the California Constitution and required by state law to reimburse the expenses of members of their legislative bodies. Most other local agencies, including cities, are not required by law to provide compensation or reimbursement or do not receive property tax, and therefore, are not eligible for state reimbursement under this bill.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

VOTES

ASM LOCAL GOVERNMENT: 8-2-0

YES: Carrillo, Pacheco, Ramos, Ransom, Blanca Rubio, Stefani, Ward, Wilson

NO: Ta, Johnson

ASM GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION: 16-5-1

YES: Blanca Rubio, Alvarez, Berman, Bryan, Carrillo, Fong, Gabriel, Gipson, McKinnor, Nguyen, Pacheco, Ramos, Michelle Rodriguez, Solache, Soria, Valencia

NO: Davies, Dixon, Gallagher, Macedo, Ta

ABS, ABST OR NV: Wallis

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-4-0

YES: Wicks, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

NO: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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