
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 1669	Hearing Date:	June 24, 2026
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Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
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Subject: Student health: medical leaves of absence: mental health.

SUMMARY

This bill requires, commencing with the 2027-28 academic year, private and public postsecondary educational institutions to adopt a written policy allowing students to take a voluntary medical leave of absence for at least a period of up to one academic year and specifies criteria for inclusion in the adopted policy.

BACKGROUND

Existing federal law:

- 1) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states no person with a disability in the United States will be denied benefits or be subjected to discrimination based on their disability in any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance. This applies to postsecondary education institutions who receive federal funding and therefore, the institutions are subject to the regulations promulgated by the Federal Government to address and prevent discrimination of people with disabilities. (United States Code (USC), Title 29, Chapter 16, Subchapter V, Section 794, colloquially known as "Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act)
- 2) The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities. Establishes people with disabilities as a protected class and prohibits discrimination in the same manner as prohibitions against racial or sex discrimination. This law guarantees that people with disabilities have the same employment opportunities, ability to access goods and services, and the ability to participate in state and local government programs. (USC Title 42, Chapter 126)

Existing state law:

- 1) The Unruh Civil Rights Act, states all people in California are free and equal and no matter their sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, medical condition, genetic condition, marital status, sexual orientation, citizenship, primary language, or immigration status and are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishments of every kind. (Civil Code § 51)

- 2) Defines disability for the Equity in Higher Education Act to mean a mental or physical disability. (Education Code (EC) § 66260.5)
- 3) Prohibits a postsecondary education institution that receives state funding from discriminating against anyone on the basis of disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any characteristic listed or defined in Section 11135 of the Government Code (this includes medical conditions) or any other characteristic that is contained in the prohibition of hate crimes set forth in subdivision (a) of Section 422.6 of the Penal Code, including immigration status. (EC § 66270)
- 4) Each postsecondary education institution in the state of California is prohibited from requiring a graduate student from taking a leave of absence or withdrawing from the program or limiting the student's graduate studies based on the fact the student is pregnant or experiencing pregnancy-related issues. A postsecondary education institution is required to provide reasonable accommodations to the pregnant graduate student so the student may complete their graduate program. Provides the terms and conditions for leaves of absence for graduate students, who are pregnant or have recently given birth and provides a separate leave of absence for non-birthing partners. Current law also requires the policies regarding pregnancy protections to be posted in various locations on campus and requires employees to be trained on the policies. (EC § 66281.7)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Requires, commencing with the 2027-28 academic year, a postsecondary educational institution adopt a written policy to allow a student to take a voluntary medical leave of absence for a period to be determined by the institution or for a period of up to one academic year, whichever is longer.
- 2) Requires that the adopted policy adhere to all of the following requirements:
 - a) Not require the submission of an official notice of withdrawal, as defined, nor send an official notice of withdrawal, as defined, to a student who takes a medical leave of absence and does not deny a student returning from medical leave of absence the ability to enroll in courses or a program of study that they were previously eligible for. The bill specifies that these provisions are not to be interpreted as prohibiting an institution from imposing conditions upon a student's return to campus after taking a medical leave of absence if, before taking the absence, the student posed a direct threat to the health or safety of others.
 - b) Allow an enrolled student in good academic standing who voluntarily takes a medical leave of absence to return to the student's program of study in good academic standing following the medical leave of absence.
 - c) Allow for a medical leave of absence to exceed the period allowed under

the adopted policy if there is a medical necessity, as determined by the student's physician or medical provider. An institution is authorized to require documentation from the student's physician or medical provider before granting an extension of the medical leave absence.

- d) Include procedures for how students may notify the institution of the need to take a medical leave of absence.
 - e) Consider whether a student who takes a medical leave of absence may be permitted on campus and may participate in campus activities during the medical leave of absence. The bill requires that in making this consideration, an institution's primary concern be student safety and is prohibited from modifying any requirements for participation in campus activities for a student who takes a medical leave of absence.
- 3) Requires the institution, if it has an existing leave of absence policy, to ensure the policy adheres to the requirements of the bill.
 - 4) Requires, after the medical leave of absence policy is adopted, the institution to do all of the following, as applicable:
 - a) Provide, as part of established campus orientations, with a copy of the policy to students at all campuses of their respective segments.
 - b) Post the policy on the institution's website.
 - c) Notify students and faculty of the location of the policy on the institution's website by sending an email at the beginning of each academic semester or term.
 - d) For an institution with an on-campus medical center, require the medical center to provide a copy of the policy to a student upon request or when otherwise, appropriate.
 - e) Require the registrar's office and the campus administrator's office to provide a copy of the policy to a student who requests information on withdrawing from the institution.
 - 5) Provides that, if upon implementation of the bill's provisions conflicts with federal law or regulations, that provision is to be rendered inoperative for the duration of the conflict and without affecting the whole.
 - 6) Provides that the bill is not to be construed or implemented in a manner that would prevent an institution from adjudicating, pursuant to the institution's adjudication procedures, an alleged violation of the student code of conduct by a student who has taken, or is currently on, a medical leave of absence from the institution.
 - 7) Defines all of the following terms for the purposes of the bill:

- a) “Adjudication procedures” to mean a postsecondary educational institution’s established process to determine if a student has violated the student code of conduct and the established process to respond when violations are sustained.
 - b) “Medical” to includes health- and mental health-related issues, including, but not limited to, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and substance use disorders.
 - c) “Postsecondary educational institution” to mean a campus of the University of California (UC), the California State University (CSU), or the California Community Colleges (CCC), a private postsecondary educational institution, as defined in Section 94858, or an independent institution of higher education, as defined in Section 66010.
 - d) “Student” to mean an undergraduate or graduate student, as recognized by the postsecondary educational institution, that is enrolled in coursework at the institution.
 - e) “Student code of conduct” to mean any rules or policies adopted by a postsecondary educational institution regarding the expectations or standards of student behavior on campus, including, but not limited to, standards related to academics, athletics, and sex discrimination.
- 8) States various findings and declarations related to student mental health challenges.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) **Need for the bill.** According to the author, “Nearly half of college students endure mental health challenges, including 37% who struggle with depression and nearly one-third who experience anxiety. While research indicates that poor mental health impedes academic performance, college students don’t always have easy access to appropriate tools or institutional support to manage these challenges. In some situations, the best solution for a student may be to take a leave of absence from school to focus on their mental or physical health.

“However, not all California colleges and universities offer a clear leave-of-absence framework. While some schools allow a student to take a medical leave of absence, others require that a student facing a mental health crisis completely withdraw. In some cases, students must reapply with no guaranteed pathway to readmission.

“AB 1669 gives students the flexibility to step away when necessary to focus on medical or mental health treatment by creating a clear, equitable, and protected pathway for students to return to their studies where they left off – without having to face academic consequences or reapply. The bill supports student health and well-being while helping more students stay on track to complete their education.”

- 2) **Establishes minimum standards for medical leaves of absence.** Typically, once admitted students are expected to enroll in consecutive academic terms unless approved to take a leave of absence. A leave of absence is essentially a pause in enrollment, whereas a withdrawal is generally treated as leaving the institution. Institutions have policies allowing students to take leaves of absence for various reasons including medical or mental health reasons. For example, at CSU, Long Beach students may take an educational leave for personal, educational, financial, medical, or other reasons for up to two semesters. UC Davis permits students to temporarily suspend academic work at UC Davis during the academic term. The leave is permitted for three consecutive quarters; the student must apply for the leave by the 10th day of instruction or withdraw and then re-apply for admission. The author argues that those policies vary across institutions. Some institutions permit students to take a medical leave and return to their studies, while others may require students to withdraw and subsequently seek readmission. This bill establishes minimum requirements for voluntary medical leave policies, including protections related to enrollment status, academic standing, return to study and notice to students. The bill attempts to provide students with a more consistent process for taking a medical leave of absence across public and private postsecondary institutions.
- 3) **Community college withdrawal policies.** CCCs operate as an open access system and generally permit students to reenroll after leaving the institutions without a selective admissions process. The Board of Governors of the CCC adopts regulations governing community college operations, including student withdrawal policies. Under current Title 5 regulations, students may withdraw from courses during designated withdrawal periods and may receive an Excused Withdrawal (EW) at any time when illness, accident, or other circumstances beyond the student's control prevent course completion. An EW does not count against enrollment attempts or academic progress calculations. This bill establishes a separate framework specifically for institutional medical leaves of absence and specifies that students taking a medical leave may not be treated as withdrawal from the institution. This is in addition to existing CCC withdrawal policies which already provide students with relatively flexible withdrawal and reenrollment pathways.
- 4) **Return to enrollment following a medical leave of absence.** The bill prohibits an institution from denying a returning student the ability to enroll in courses or a program of study for which the student was previously eligible. The bill also requires institutions to permit students in good academic standing who take a voluntary medical leave to return to their program in good academic standing. Some institutions require students to withdraw rather than take a leave. Proponents of this measure contend that while some institutions provide a formal leave process that preserves a student's pathway back to the institution, others may require students to withdraw and subsequently seek readmission or reentry into their program of study. This bill seeks to establish minimum safeguards for students who temporarily step away from their studies due to medical or mental health challenges.
- 5) **Student mental health challenges.** The Health Minds Network conducts an annual national study of student mental health. The 2024-2025 survey included

84,000 student responses from 135 colleges and universities. According to their report, approximately 37 percent of college students have symptoms of depression, 33 percent report symptoms of anxiety, 50 percent have lifetime diagnoses of mental disorders, and 38 percent receive some form of mental health services. The author also cites research findings that nearly one half of college aged individuals experienced a psychiatric disorder during the previous year. Research cited by the author further shows that mental health challenges may affect students' daily functioning, academic performance, and educational motivation. Seemingly, a temporary leave of absence may provide students with an opportunity to address medical or mental health challenges and return prepared to continue their studies.

- 6) **Student conduct on campus.** While the bill establishes minimum protections for students taking a medical leave of absence, it does not prohibit institutions from imposing conditions on a student's return when the student poses a direct threat to the health and/or safety of others prior to taking leave. The bill further clarifies that institutions retain authority to investigate and adjudicate alleged violations of student conduct policies while a student is on a medical leave of absence. These provisions attempt to preserve existing campus safety and disciplinary processes.

SUPPORT

Cal Voices
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California Behavioral Health Association
California Hospital Association
California Youth Empowerment Network
Mental Health America of California
University of California Student Association

OPPOSITION

None received

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