
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1669 (Pacheco) - Student health: medical leaves of absence: mental health

Version: June 15, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: ED. 6 - 0

Mandate: Yes

Consultant: Lenin Del Castillo

Bill 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.

Fiscal Impact:

- The University of California estimates one-time General Fund costs of up to \$2 million for administrative and technical startup costs and approximately \$1 million ongoing for maintenance and administrative costs. These costs include the updating of programming for new policy definitions and to allow students to drop all classes without providing an official notice of withdrawal.
- The California State University estimates ongoing General Fund costs in the mid-hundreds of thousands of dollars each year for campuses to provide ongoing case management compliance monitoring, and additional one-time General Fund costs of \$440,000 or \$20,000 per campus to update systemwide leave policies, computer systems and procedures, and systems/process updates and website changes.
- The Chancellor's Office estimates one-time Proposition 98 General Fund costs ranging between \$2.4 million to \$5.4 million for community college districts statewide to develop and implement a new medical leave of absence policy, including the adoption of a formal medical leave of absence status that preserves a student's enrollment, academic standing, and guaranteed right to return without reapplication.

Background: Existing law 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.

Existing law provides that each postsecondary education institution 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. The law 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. Existing 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.

Proposed Law: This bill 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.

This bill requires that the adopted policy adhere to all of the following requirements:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Include procedures for how students may notify the institution of the need to take a medical leave of absence.
5. 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.

This bill requires the institution, if it has an existing leave of absence policy, to ensure the policy adheres to the requirements of the bill.

This bill requires, after the medical leave of absence policy is adopted, the institution to do all of the following:

1. Provide, as part of established campus orientations, with a copy of the policy to students at all campuses of their respective segments.
2. Post the policy on the institution's website.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.

This bill 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. It also 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.

This bill defines "medical" to include health- and mental health-related issues, including, but not limited to, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and substance use disorders.

Staff Comments: This bill establishes minimum requirements for voluntary medical leave policies. Specifically, this 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. 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."

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