

Date of Hearing: March 24, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
Ash Kalra, Chair  
AB 2534 (Kalra) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

**SUBJECT:** DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACT: FORCED MARRIAGE

**KEY ISSUE:** SHOULD THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACT BE AMENDED TO ALLOW A PARTY TO A COMPLETED OR FORCED MARRIAGE TO OBTAIN A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESTRAINING ORDER?

**SYNOPSIS**

*Forced marriage, where one or both parties is compelled to enter into a marriage without consent, is an issue of global concern particularly impacting women and young girls from lower-income families. Once in a forced marriage, parties often experience additional emotional and physical abuse, and may be isolated from their support networks. These circumstances can make it exceedingly difficult for victims of a forced marriage to escape. While existing law criminalizes the act of compelling or forcing someone into a marriage and provides an opportunity for certain people to obtain a domestic violence restraining order, there appears to be a lack of legal recourse for victims of forced marriages. In particular, it appears that parties to a forced marriage may not qualify for a DVRO in many circumstances. This bill seeks to address this abandoned middle-ground by clearly establishing that a party to a completed or attempted forced marriage may petition the court for a domestic violence restraining order.*

*This bill is sponsored by the Family Violence Law Center, Choose Your Path, and Tahirih Justice Center. It enjoys support from Building Futures, Family Reunification Equity and Empowerment (F.R.E.E.), Gender Justice LA, Love Never Fails, Maitri Bay Area, Messaging for Success, Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California, Strong Hearted Native Women's Coalition, Inc., and the Women's Foundation California. The Family Violence Appellate Project has submitted a position of support if amended. Their requests are discussed in the body of this analysis. There is no formal opposition on file.*

**SUMMARY:** Incorporates forced marriage as grounds for petitioning the court for a domestic violence restraining order. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Makes the following findings and declarations:
  - a) Forced marriage is a form of abuse and coercive control that falls within the protective purposes of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA). This act clarifies that courts may issue restraining orders to prevent, enjoin, and remedy forced marriage using existing DVPA procedures and penalties;
  - b) Forced marriage, in all its forms, is a pervasive issue in this state and a violation of fundamental human rights;
  - c) Anyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, color, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, education, socioeconomic status, marital status, relationship to the

perpetrator, immigration or citizenship status, language proficiency, veteran or military status, or disability, may be a victim of forced marriage;

- d) Forced marriage harms not only victims but also their families, communities, and society at large;
  - e) Victims of forced marriage deserve full protection and relief under California law;
  - f) The purposes of this measure are to prevent acts of forced marriage and to remedy their effects on victims and communities through timely and effective civil protection. This measure is intended to protect individuals from being forced into marriage or from attempts, threats, or preparations to compel marriage, and to provide relief to those seeking to escape or recover from that coercion.
- 2) Amends the definition of “domestic violence” to include abuse perpetrated against a party to a forced marriage or an attempted forced marriage.
  - 3) Defines “forced marriage” to mean a spousal relationship in which one or both parties do not or cannot consent and one or both parties are compelled, through force, fraud, coercion, duress, abuse of power, or coercive control, to enter, attempt to enter, or maintain a marriage, regardless of whether the marriage is legally valid.
  - 4) Instructs that the DVPA shall be liberally construed to prevent forced marriage and related coercive conduct. Prohibits relief from being denied on the basis that the conduct is claimed to be customary, religious, cultural, or lawful in another jurisdiction. Prohibits passage of time alone from barring relief.
  - 5) Authorizes an order to be issued under the DVPA upon reasonable proof of prior instances of forced marriage or a credible risk of forced marriage occurring.
  - 6) Authorizes the court to grant relief regardless of whether a marriage has occurred or whether a purported marriage would be legally valid in this state or any other jurisdiction.
  - 7) Expands the existing definition of “coercive control” for purposes of determining whether a party has been “disturbing the peace of the other party” to include interfering with, threatening, or attempting to prevent a party or witness from participating in court proceedings;
  - 8) Expands the definition of “disturbing the peace of the other party” to also include conduct undertaken to compel, attempt to compel, prepare for, or facilitate a forced marriage. Provides examples that include but are not limited to any of the following:
    - a) Threats, intimidation, harassment, or abuse targeted at a person in an attempt to secure a marriage without consent;
    - b) Confiscating, withholding, or controlling passports, visas, identity documents, or travel documents;
    - c) Isolation, surveillance, restriction of movement or communication, or financial control;

- d) Arranging, officiating, financing, or facilitating a marriage ceremony or related travel with knowledge that the marriage is being forced.
- 9) Authorizes the court, in cases involving forced marriage or a credible risk thereof, to issue any order otherwise authorized under the DVPA. Including, but not limited to:
- a) Orders prohibiting the arrangement, solemnization, or facilitation of any marriage involving the protected party during the term of the order;
  - b) Orders requiring the surrender or return of passports, visas, or other travel or identity documents necessary to prevent removal of the protected party;
  - c) Orders restraining third parties who knowingly aid or abet conduct enjoined under this division, to the extent permitted by law;
  - d) Orders necessary to ensure that a person is not removed from school, or prevented from attending school, medical or mental health appointments, meetings with service providers or attorneys, or extracurricular activities;
  - e) Orders necessary to prevent the transportation of a person outside the jurisdiction for purposes related to a forced marriage.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the Domestic Violence Protection Act (DVPA) setting forth procedural and substantive requirements for the issuance of a “protective order,” whether issued ex parte, after notice and hearing, or in a judgment, that enjoins specified acts of abuse, excluding a person from a dwelling, or enjoining other specified behavior. (Family Code Section 6200 *et seq.* All further statutory references are to the Family Code.)
- 2) States that the purpose of the DVPA is to prevent acts of domestic violence, abuse, and sexual abuse and to provide for a separation of the persons involved in the domestic violence for a period sufficient to enable these persons to seek a resolution of the causes of the violence. (Section 6220.)
- 3) Provides that a domestic violence restraining order (DVRO) may be issued to restrain a person, as specified, based on an affidavit or testimony and any additional information provided to the court that shows, to the satisfaction of the court, reasonable proof of a past act or acts of abuse. Specifies that a court may issue an order under this part based solely on the affidavit or testimony of the person requesting the restraining order. (Section 6300 (a).)
- 4) Defines “domestic violence” as abuse perpetrated against any of the following persons:
  - a) A spouse or former spouse;
  - b) A cohabitant or former cohabitant, as defined;
  - c) A person with whom the respondent is having or has had a dating or engagement relationship;

- d) A person with whom the respondent has had a child, where the presumption applies that the male parent is the father of the child of the female parent;
  - e) A child of a party or a child who is the subject of an action under the Uniform Parentage Act, where the presumption applies that the male parent is the father of the child to be protected;
  - f) Any other person related by consanguinity or affinity within the second degree. (Section 6211.)
- 5) Authorizes a court to issue an order under the DVPA to restrain any person to prevent acts of domestic violence, if an affidavit or testimony and any additional information provided to the court shows, to the satisfaction of the court, reasonable proof of a past act or acts of abuse. Authorizes the court to issue an order under the DVPA based solely on the affidavit or testimony of the person requesting the restraining order. (Section 6300.)
- 6) Authorizes a court to issue an ex parte order enjoining a party from, among other actions, disturbing the peace of another party. (Section 6320.)
- 7) Authorizes the court to issue a number of orders after notice and a hearing, including: orders enjoining a party from molesting; attacking; striking; stalking; threatening; sexually assaulting; battering; credibly impersonating; falsely personating; harassing; telephoning; destroying personal property; contacting, either directly or indirectly, by mail or otherwise; coming within a specified distance of; or disturbing the peace of the other party, and, in the discretion of the court, on a showing of good cause, of other named family or household members; and granting the petitioner the exclusive care, possession, or control of any animal owned or controlled by the petitioner or respondent or a minor child residing in the residence or household. (Section 6340 (a).)
- 8) Authorizes a court to issue an order excluding a person from a dwelling if the court finds that physical or emotional harm would otherwise result to the other party, to a person under the care, custody, and control of the other party, or to a minor child of the parties or other party. (Section 6340 (c).)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** As currently in print this bill is keyed fiscal.

**COMMENTS:** Forced marriage, where one or both parties is compelled to enter into a marriage without consent, is an issue of global concern particularly impacting women and young girls from lower-income families. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, children from poor families or who are in unstable situations, including those with uncertain immigration status, are more likely to face pressure to enter into an unwanted marriage. Once in such relationships, victims often endure additional emotional trauma and abuse, physical violence, and financial abuse. (*Forced marriage and human trafficking: What you need to know*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime available at: [https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2025/December/forced-marriage-and-human-trafficking\\_-what-you-need-to-know.html](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2025/December/forced-marriage-and-human-trafficking_-what-you-need-to-know.html).) Forced marriages, which can be coordinated by other family members or non-family community members, may also involve isolating the victim or victims from their support networks. According to data provided by the proponents of the measure, victims of forced marriages are often taken across state and international borders, limiting the ability of California and United States authorities to intervene. Unfortunately, it

seems California's existing laws may have a blind spot with regard to the subject of forced marriages, leaving these survivors out in the cold. The author posits:

AB 2534 is a critical piece of legislation that will extend domestic violence protections for women and girls being forced into a marriage or survivors of forced marriages. Victims of forced marriage often experience abuse, isolation, financial control, surveillance, and immigration threats from the perpetrator and extended family. In these cases, the perpetrator does not act alone, and coercion is often reinforced by family members or community members.

While forced marriages are a crime under existing law, many victims find themselves in dangerous situations without protective measures. The ability to file a restraining order will empower young girls and women to take steps to protect themselves with confidence.

AB 2534 will ensure that those being forced into a marriage, or survivors of a forced marriage, can get a restraining order against their perpetrator and others aiding in this process. By adding forced marriage to the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, these women and young girls will be able to file a Domestic Violence Restraining Order to ensure their safety and protection from those forcing them into a nonconsensual marriage.

***California's marriage statutes.*** To establish a legally valid marriage Family Code Section 300 requires 1) the consent of both parties, 2) the issuance of a license issued by the county clerk and 3) solemnization. The statute additionally specifies that the license only becomes a valid marriage certificate once it is registered with the county recorder. The Family Code also requires both parties to be at least 18 years old in order to obtain a marriage license, subject to a very narrow exception requiring permission from the court. (Family Code Section 302 – 304.) The Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) allows people in qualifying relationships to seek a restraining order against another person to protect against harassing or abusive behavior. (Family Code Section 6200 *et seq.*) Finally, under California Penal Code Section 265, it is a crime to force one or more parties to marry against their will.

Unfortunately, California's marriage-related statutes leave issues related to forced marriage unaddressed. First, in order to obtain relief under the Penal Code, a marriage must have already occurred. Additionally, while not explicit in the text of the statute, it seems that the provision only captures legally valid marriages. Not only does this foreclose relief to individuals who are not yet married, but also excludes victims of forced marriages that are conducted outside the judicial system from its jurisdiction. Finally, despite the "domestic" nature of a marriage, whether legal or not, victims of a forced marriage may not be able to obtain protection against those most involved in coordinating the unwanted union unless they are an immediate family member or the other party to the marriage.

In an effort to bolster protections for parties to forced marriages, ***this bill*** expands the DVPA to capture the unique circumstances created by forced marriages and clarify a path for survivors to obtain domestic violence restraining orders against any potential party to the coercion.

***A brief summary of the role and procedures of domestic violence restraining orders.*** Like most restraining orders, DVROs usually take the form of "stay away" orders that ensure separation of the parties, at least for as long as it takes to appear in court or eliminate the threat of violence. Emergency protective orders and temporary restraining orders are issued *ex parte* – that is, based only upon the affidavit or testimony of the party seeking relief. A permanent restraining order,

on the other hand, may be issued only after a hearing at which the respondent is free to attend and testify. Because of their inherently time-sensitive manner, requests for ex-parte orders are reviewed and, if approved, issued on the same day as requested, or the next business day at the latest. An ex parte order is typically short in duration and may then be followed by an order after hearing within 21 days of filing the underlying petition. In the time between an ex parte order and a hearing on the petition, the petitioner must provide the respondent with notice of the petition, and a copy of the ex parte order if issued. A petitioner can often request that the sheriff's department provide this notice so as to not expose the petitioner to greater risk of harm. Once a restraining order has been issued, it is immediately entered into a law enforcement database and may be enforced.

***How this measure incorporates forced marriage survivors into the DVPA.*** Section 4 of the bill requires the DVPA to be liberally construed to prevent forced marriage and related coercive conduct. The new section additionally prohibits relief from being denied on the basis that the conduct is claimed to be customary, religious, cultural, or lawful in another jurisdiction, or due to the passage of time alone. The Family Violence Appellate Project (FVAP), which has submitted a position of support if amended, raises concern that the requirement that the DVPA be liberally construed specifically to prevent forced marriage may inadvertently narrow the same requirement as applied to other forms of domestic violence already contemplated by the DVPA. Narrowing the scope of the DVPA in no way appears to be the intent of either the sponsors or the author and therefore the parties are encouraged to discuss this issue to clarify the language in question.

***Definitions.*** As currently enacted, the DVPA defines “domestic violence” as abuse perpetrated against certain people including: a spouse or former spouse; a cohabitant or former cohabitant; a person in a current or former dating or engagement relationship; a person with whom someone has had a child; a child; or any other person of blood-relationship within the second degree.

Forced marriages pose a unique complication to petitions for DVROs because, while some forced marriages may involve parties who are related to one another in one of these ways, others may not. For example, the marriage may be coordinated by a member of the community to whom the party to the marriage is not related in any capacity. This person may be in a position to exert significant pressure and control on the party being forced into the marriage, but absent the familial relationship and despite the “domestic” nature of marriage, the court would likely have no jurisdiction to issue a DVRO. Nevertheless, by its nature as a forced *marriage*, it seems appropriate to allow people facing such threats to petition for a DVRO. Therefore, this bill would amend the definition of “domestic violence” to include abuse perpetrated against a party to a forced marriage or an attempted forced marriage.

To further incorporate forced marriages under the scope of the DVPA, this bill would also define “forced marriage” as a spousal relationship in which at least one person does not or cannot consent and are compelled to enter into the marriage, regardless of whether the marriage itself is legally valid.

Working in tandem these definitions would carve a clear path for people who have been, or are being, forced into an unwanted marriage to explicitly qualify for a domestic violence restraining order.

***Definition of “coercive control” and “disturbing the peace.”*** Family Code Sections 6320 – 6327 provides guidelines and procedures for a court to issue an ex parte order. Section 6340 then

allows a court to issue an order after a hearing on any of the same grounds authorized in the provisions guiding ex parte orders. (Family Code Section 6340.) Under Section 6320, a court may issue an ex parte order prohibiting the respondent from “disturbing the peace” of the petitioner. “Disturbing the peace” is further defined as “conduct, based on the totality of the circumstances, destroys the mental or emotional calm of the other party,” and further specified to include “coercive control, which is a pattern of behavior that in purpose or effect unreasonably interferes with a person’s free will and personal liberty.” (Family Code Section 6320 (c).) The statute then proceeds to give examples of coercive control, many of which may very well apply to situations involving forced marriage. However, survivors of forced marriages report that their experiences often fall outside the existing examples. Acknowledging this bill is proposing to expand the DVPA in a novel way and that more examples may therefore be helpful in the implementation of the changes, this provision would be modified to incorporate “interfering with, threatening, or attempting to prevent a party or witness from participating in court proceedings” as an example of “coercive control”.

Similarly, this bill proposes to further expand this section to specify that conduct that seeks to “compel, attempt to compel, prepare for, or facilitate a forced marriage” constitutes disturbing the peace of the petitioning party, and provides a number of examples.

***Expanding the types of proof of abuse that may justify a DVRO.*** Existing law authorizes a court to issue an order to restrain a person based on an affidavit or testimony that shows, to the satisfaction of the court, reasonable proof of a past act or acts of abuse. (Family Code Section 6300 (a).) Family Code Section 6203 defines “abuse” as intentionally or recklessly causing or attempting to cause bodily injury; sexual assault; placing a person in reasonable apprehension of imminent serious bodily injury to that person or another; or engaging in any behavior that has been or could be enjoined in an ex parte order. Like the Act’s existing definitions, the language of this provision may not capture circumstances involving forced marriages. This bill would therefore likewise amend Family Code Section 6300 to allow a court to issue an order upon reasonable proof of prior instances of forced marriage or a credible risk of forced marriage occurring, regardless of whether a marriage actually occurred or would be legally valid in California.

***Expanding the types of orders a judge may issue after a hearing on the petition.*** Finally, this bill proposes to expand the types of orders a judge can issue in a DVRO after a full hearing on the petition to reflect actions that may be appropriate to protect a party to a forced marriage. Reflecting experiences that victims of forced marriages commonly endure, this bill proposes to include the following as types of orders that a judge may issue in a DVRO: orders prohibiting the arrangement, solemnization, or facilitation of any marriage involving the protected party; orders requiring the surrender of passports or other forms of ID; orders necessary to ensure that a person is not removed from school or prevented from attending school, medical or mental health appointments, meetings with service providers or attorneys, or extracurricular activities; orders necessary to prevent transportation of a person outside of the court’s jurisdiction for reasons related to the forced marriage.

The bill would also authorize a court to issue “orders restraining third parties who knowingly aid or abet the conduct restricted by the DVRO, to the extent permitted by law.” This language reflects one of the unique aspects of a forced marriage in that it does not necessarily *only* involve the parties to be married, but also often includes larger communities and parties outside of the intended marriage.

While they have not registered an official position with the Committee, the Judicial Council has raised concerns to Committee staff about this provision. The Judicial Council's concern, which centers on existing statutory notice requirements and due process issues, appears to be echoed by the Family Violence Appellate Project (FVAP). The note is well taken, as existing law does require that a respondent receive notice of the proceedings before the hearing on the petition. Arguably the final clause in the existing subparagraph ("to the extent permitted by law") captures this notice requirement already. Nonetheless, *the author may wish to consider a modest amendment to clarify that a court may issue an order restraining named third parties who knowingly aid or abet the conduct restricted by the DVRO.*

The Family Violence Appellate Project raises four additional concerns about the bill as it is currently in print. It appears that the concerns can largely be attributed to a disagreement in interpretation and thus may be easily addressed with some clarifying language. For example, it is likely not the author or sponsor's intent to prohibit a party seeking a DVRO from *ever* marrying again, a concern that FVAP raises about the language modifying the types of orders a judge may issue. Neither would it be reasonable to assume that the bill's proponents wish to limit the liberal interpretation of the DVPA to only cases involving forced marriages. Therefore, it seems that some continued conversations are in order and likely to result in a favorable conclusion for all stakeholders.

***ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:*** This bill is sponsored by the Family Violence Law Center, Tahirih Justice Center, and Choose Your Path Foundation. It enjoys additional support from a number of domestic violence prevention organizations, family law-focused organizations, Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California, and the Women's Foundation California. The Family Violence Appellate Project has submitted a position of support if amended. In support of the bill, Family Violence Law Center writes:

This critical legislation addresses a dangerous gap in California's protection of survivors by explicitly recognizing forced marriage as a form of abuse under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA).

[...]

Forced marriage is a serious violation of human rights that often involves physical violence, sexual assault, and confinement. Without the specific protections provided by AB 2534, many survivors are left without a clear legal pathway to prevent these harms before they occur. The need for this bill is underscored by several alarming data points:

- **A Pervasive but Hidden Crisis:** Between 2009 and 2011, the Tahirih Justice Center— a sponsor of this bill— received reports of nearly 3,000 cases of forced marriage or the risk of forced marriage in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Many of these cases involved minors and young adults who were unable to access traditional legal remedies.
- **The Threat of International Abduction:** Forced marriage often involves "vacationing" survivors to other countries where they have fewer legal rights. According to the U.S. Department of State, once a survivor is taken across international borders, the ability of the U.S. government to intervene is severely limited. AB 2534 provides the preemptive, emergency authority needed to order the surrender of travel documents, stopping this abduction before it begins.

- **Coercive Control and Overlapping Abuse:** Research indicates that forced marriage is rarely an isolated incident; it is almost always accompanied by coercive control, including financial abuse, physical threats, and reproductive coercion. Under current California law, the DVPA does not explicitly list forced marriage as a basis for a Domestic Violence Restraining Order (DVRO), making it difficult for courts to provide comprehensive relief.

- **Safety Upon Separation:** Data shows that separation is the most dangerous time for victims of domestic abuse. For those attempting to flee a forced marriage, this risk is heightened by the involvement of extended family or community actors who may aid in the coercion.

AB 2534 provides survivors with a robust "shield" by allowing the court to prohibit third parties from facilitating a marriage and ensuring that a survivor is not removed from school or essential services as a means of punishment or control. California must join other leading states in providing clear, actionable legal protections for those at risk of being forced into a marriage against their will. We urge your support for this life-saving measure.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

Choose Your Path (CYP) Foundation (co-sponsor)  
Family Violence Law Center (co-sponsor)  
Tahirih Justice Center (co-sponsor)  
Building Futures  
Family Reunification Equity & Empowerment (F.R.E.E.)  
Gender Justice LA  
Love Never Fails  
Maitri Bay Area  
Messaging for Success  
Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California  
Strong Hearted Native Women's Coalition, Inc.  
Women's Foundation California

### **Support if Amended**

Family Violence Appellate Project

### **Opposition**

None on file

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