

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING  
AB 2534 (Kalra)  
As Introduced February 20, 2026  
Majority vote

## SUMMARY

Incorporates forced marriage as grounds for petitioning the court for a domestic violence restraining order.

### Major Provisions

- 1) Amends the definition of "domestic violence" to include abuse perpetrated against a party to a forced marriage or an attempted forced marriage.
- 2) 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.
- 3) Authorizes an order to be issued under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) upon reasonable proof of prior instances of forced marriage or a credible risk of forced marriage occurring.
- 4) 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.
- 5) 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;
- 6) 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.
- 7) 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 orders specific to circumstances involving forced marriages.

**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. 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.

*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. This bill amends 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 also defines "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.

*Definition of "coercive control" and "disturbing the peace."* Family Code Sections 6320 – 6327 provide 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 expands 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 domestic violence restraining order (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. This bill amends 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 also authorizes 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.

### **According to the Author**

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.

### 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:

- 1) *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.
- 2) *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.
- 3) *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.
- 4) *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.

### Arguments in Opposition

None on file

**FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) Minor and absorbable costs to the Judicial Council for modifying and adopting new forms to incorporate forced marriage into the DVRO process. The Judicial Council requests a one-year delayed implementation to make these changes effectively.
- 2) Unknown but likely minor costs to trial courts (Trial Court Trust Fund) for additional DVRO filings and hearings. According to the Judicial Council, many potential petitioners may already qualify for a DVRO under existing law, so it is unclear how many filings would be entirely new. The Judicial Council notes that DVRO hearings operate on tight statutory timeframes, and additional filings may result in some delays for other civil cases.

**VOTES****ASM JUDICIARY: 12-0-0**

**YES:** Kalra, Macedo, Bauer-Kahan, Bryan, Connolly, Dixon, Harabedian, Pacheco, Papan, Sanchez, Stefani, Zbur

**ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 13-0-2**

**YES:** Wicks, Hoover, Arambula, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Calderon, Muratsuchi

**UPDATED**

VERSION: February 20, 2026

CONSULTANT: Manuela Boucher / JUD. / (916) 319-2334

FN: 0002400