
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 268
Author: Kalra (D) and Patel (D), et al.
Amended: 6/13/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE GOVERNMENTAL ORG. COMMITTEE: 13-0, 6/24/25
AYES: Padilla, Archuleta, Ashby, Blakespear, Cervantes, Dahle, Hurtado, Jones,
Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Wahab, Weber Pierson
NO VOTE RECORDED: Choi, Ochoa Bogh

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 5-0, 7/9/25
AYES: Pérez, Cabaldon, Cortese, Gonzalez, Laird
NO VOTE RECORDED: Ochoa Bogh, Choi

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25
AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: State holidays: Diwali

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill adds Diwali to the list of state holidays, and authorizes public schools to close and state employees to take a certain type of leave in recognition of Diwali, as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

1) Recognizes various state holidays including:

a) January 1st (New Year);

- b) Third Monday in January (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day);
 - c) February 12th (Lincoln Day);
 - d) Third Monday in February (Washington Day);
 - e) March 31st (Cesar Chavez Day);
 - f) April 24, known as “Genocide Remembrance Day.”
 - g) Last Monday in May (Memorial Day);
 - h) June 19, known as “Juneteenth.”
 - i) July 4th;
 - j) September 9 (Admission day);
 - k) Fourth Friday in September (Native American Day);
 - l) Second Monday in October (Columbus Day);
 - m) November 11th (Veterans Day);
 - n) December 25th;
 - o) Good Friday from 12 noon until 3 p.m.
- 2) Specifies that if the above holidays are in conflict with the provisions of a memorandum of understanding, the memorandum of understanding shall be controlling without further legislative action.
- 3) Specifies that the above holidays, except for “Cesar Chavez Day” and “Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day,” shall not apply to a city, county, or district unless made applicable by charter, or by ordinance or resolution of the governing body.
- 4) Authorizes a state employee, as defined, to elect to receive eight hours of holiday credit for the fourth Friday in September, known as “Native American Day,” in lieu of receiving eight hours of personal holiday credit, as specified.
- 5) Authorizes an employee in State Bargaining Unit 5, to elect to use eight hours of vacation, annual leave, or compensating time off consistent with departmental operational needs and collective bargaining agreements for the fourth Friday in September, known as “Native American Day.”
- 6) Adopts state holidays as judicial holidays, with certain exceptions, including Admission Day and Columbus day.

This bill:

- 1) Adds Diwali to the list of state holidays.

- 2) Adds Diwali to the list of holidays that are excluded from designation as a judicial holiday.
- 3) Authorizes public schools and community colleges to close on Diwali, as specified.
- 4) Authorizes state employees to elect to take time off with pay in recognition of Diwali, as specified.
- 5) Makes various legislative findings as to the significance of Diwali.

Background

Author Statement. According to the author's office, "California is home to largest population of Indian Americans, many of whom recognize and celebrate the religious and historical significance of Diwali and its festivities. Recognizing Diwali as an official state holiday embraces California's values in its diversity and affords those within the state to better observe and celebrate Diwali. AB 268 adds Diwali to the list of state holidays in California law, which is associated with a festival of great significance to Indian Americans and South Asian Americans and is celebrated annually by Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains across the globe."

Background on Diwali. Diwali, also known as Deepavali, is a major festival in India and among Indian communities across the world. Often referred to as the Festival of Lights, Diwali is a celebration of the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, and hope over despair. Diwali typically falls in October or November, based on the Hindu lunar calendar, and spans five days of festivities. The word "Diwali" comes from the Sanskrit word *deepavali*, meaning "row of lights," which reflects the custom of lighting oil lamps, or *diyas*, to illuminate homes, temples, and public spaces. Each day of Diwali holds its own religious and cultural significance, but the third day—often associated with Lakshmi Puja—is generally the most widely celebrated and recognized.

The meaning and stories behind Diwali can vary across India's many regions and religious traditions. In northern India, Diwali marks the return of Lord Rama to his kingdom of Ayodhya after fourteen years in exile and his victory over the demon king Ravana, as described in the ancient Hindu epic, the Ramayana. People lit rows of lamps to guide Rama home, a tradition that continues to this day. In southern India, Diwali celebrates Lord Krishna's defeat of the demon Narakasura, symbolizing the end of evil and oppression. For Jains, the holiday commemorates

the spiritual awakening (moksha) of Lord Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara, while Sikhs observe Bandi Chhor Divas, honoring the release of Guru Hargobind Ji and 52 princes from imprisonment by the Mughal emperor.

Diwali is celebrated with great enthusiasm and preparation. Families tend to thoroughly clean and decorate their homes, symbolizing the removal of negative energy and the welcoming of prosperity. Colorful patterns made from dyed powders or flower petals are laid at entrances to invite good fortune. On the main night of the festival, people perform Lakshmi Puja to honor the goddess of wealth and prosperity, praying for blessings in the coming year. Ganesha, the god of wisdom and new beginnings, is also worshipped. After prayers, families light hundreds of candles and fireworks, enjoy feasts filled with traditional sweets like *ladoo*s and *barfis*, and exchange gifts and well-wishes with friends and neighbors.

Beyond its religious roots, Diwali serves as a cultural event, bringing together people of diverse backgrounds in a shared celebration of renewal, generosity, and light. For many, Diwali also marks the start of a new financial year, especially in the business community, where ledgers are opened fresh and blessings are sought for future success. Across the globe, Diwali has become a symbol of Indian culture and spirituality, celebrated not only in India but in countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, the UK, the United States, and beyond.

Unpaid/Paid holidays. California law does not require a private employer to provide its employees with paid holidays, that it closes its business on any holiday, or that employees be given the day off for any particular holiday. If an employer closes its business on holidays and gives its employees time off from work with pay, that occurred pursuant to a policy or practice adopted by the employer, pursuant to the terms of a collective bargaining agreement, or pursuant to the terms of an employment agreement between the employer and employee, as there is nothing in law that requires such a practice.

At the local level, cities have the liberty to specify by charter, ordinance or resolution what paid holidays the city will provide to its city employees. Similarly, most state workers are bound by the memorandum of understanding that they have negotiated with the Governor.

For all other state employees, they are generally entitled to the following holidays: January 1, the third Monday in January, the third Monday in February, March 31, the last Monday in May, July 4, the first Monday in September, November 11, Thanksgiving Day, the day after Thanksgiving, December 25, a personal holiday

after six months of work, and every day appointed by the Governor for a public fast, thanksgiving, or holiday.

This bill adds “Diwali” to the list of state holidays.

Related/Prior Legislation

AB 1655 (Jones-Sawyer, Chapter 753, Statutes of 2022) adds June 19, known as “Juneteenth,” to the list of state holidays and authorize state employees to elect to take time off with pay in recognition of Juneteenth, as specified.

AB 1741 (Low, 2022) would have required the Governor to annually proclaim November 20 as “Transgender Day of Remembrance.” (Vetoed by Governor Newsom)

AB 1801 (Nazarian, Chapter 761, Statutes of 2022) added April 24, known as “Genocide Awareness Day,” to the list of state holidays and authorize community colleges and public schools to close on April 24, known as “Genocide Awareness Day,” as specified. Additionally, the bill would authorize state employees to elect to take time off with pay in recognition of “Genocide Awareness Day,” as specified.

AB 1872 (Low, 2022) makes the day of statewide general elections even-numbered years a state holiday, and eliminates Washington day as a holiday in those years. (Held in the Assembly Appropriations Suspense File)

AB 2596 (Low, Chapter 792, Statutes of 2022) repealed provisions requiring the Governor to annually proclaim the Lunar New year, and instead recognized the Lunar Year as a state holiday and authorizes state employees, with specified exceptions, to elect to receive eight hours of holiday credit for the Lunar New Year in lieu of receiving eight hours of personal holiday credit, as specified.

SB 383 (Stone, 2017) would have required state employees be given time off with pay for the day after Thanksgiving, or for Yom Kippur, whichever the day is chosen by the employee and recognizes Yom Kippur as a state holiday. (Failed Passage in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee)

AB 674 (Low, 2017) would make the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of each year in which a statewide or national election is held as a state holiday. (Held in the Assembly Appropriations Suspense File)

AB 1973 (Hernandez, Chapter, Statutes of 2014) established the Fourth Friday in September as a state holiday known as Native American Day.

AB 55 (Hernandez, 2013) would have recognized the 4th Friday in September as a state holiday to be known as Native American Day. (Held in Assembly Appropriations Suspense File)

AB 1953 (Baca, Chapter 637, Statutes of 1998) renamed "American Indian Day" to "Native American Day" and authorized the State Board of Education to adopt a model curriculum guide related to "Native American Day."

SBX3 8 (Ducheny, Chapter 4, Statutes of 2009) changed Lincoln and Columbus Day from paid holidays to unpaid holidays. Both Lincoln Day and Columbus Day remain as recognized holidays in California, but state employees are no longer compensated for a day of paid leave unless specified in existing bargaining agreements.

SB 984 (Polanco, Chapter 213, Statutes of 2000) established a paid holiday for state employees each March 31, which would be designated as "Cesar Chavez Day."

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, unknown, potentially significant fiscal impact to local educational agencies (LEAs), to the extent their governing boards agree to the paid holiday (Proposition 98 General Fund). The California Department of Education (CDE) notes in Fiscal Year 2023-24, the total amount LEAs paid in classified salaries was \$17,781,260,179. With 260 possible working days not adjusted for holidays and vacation, the statewide cost of one day of pay for classified employees of school districts, county offices of education, charter schools, and K-12 joint powers authorities is approximately \$68.8 million. CDE notes that there would be no direct fiscal impact to the department from this bill.

Also, unknown total fiscal impact, potentially ranging in the tens to low hundreds of thousands of dollars to the California Community Colleges (CCCs), to the extent that districts decide to enter into a memorandum of understanding with faculty or staff unions to observe Diwali (Proposition 98 General Fund). The CCCs Chancellor's Office notes there may be workload costs in the low thousands of dollars per district to develop the policy, and additional cost pressures to add a

corresponding instructional day. Other workload for each CCC district would include minor costs to update guidance and other documents related to community college holidays. There are 73 community college districts in California.

Additionally, unknown fiscal impact to the California State University (CSU), to the extent collective bargaining agreements with staff may need to be renegotiated and the academic calendar needs to be rearranged. The CSU notes an additional holiday presents a cost of approximately \$25.4 million to the CSU associated with a loss of productivity.

Finally, unknown, potentially absorbable costs to the California Department of Human Resources to update holiday policies.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/28/25)

Aantorik INC.

Americans4hindus

Annapoorna USA Foundation

Asian-Indian American Women's Group of Orange County

Baps Shri Swaminarayan Sanstha

Bay Area Youth Vaishnav Parivar

Caring Hands for Children

Center for Spiritual Enlightenment

Coalition of Hindus of North America

Department of Industrial Relations

Fia Foundation

Folsom Hindu Temple and Cultural Center

Fresno Unified School District

Global Organization of People of Indian Origin of Fremont

Global Organization of People of Indian Origin of Los Angeles

Gurudwara Sant Sagar

Hindu American Foundation

Hindu American Political Action Committee

Hindu American Political Action Committee of Florida

Hindu Americans of San Diego

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh

Hindu Yuva

Hindupact - Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective

Hongkonger Community Center Foundation

Indiaspora

Indo-american Community Federation, Fremont CA

Iskon
Jain Center of Northern California
Jewish Community Relations Council (SACRAMENTO)
Kashmir Hindu Foundation
Laxmi Narayan Temple
Lunch Bag Initiative
Mandir
My Temple
Orange County Hindus
Overseas Volunteers for a Better India
Sailen Saha
Saisevasadan
Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office
Saratoga Hindu Temple and Community Center
Sewa International
Shree Ganesh Utsav Samiti
Shri Darshan
Sikh Coalition
Silicon Valley Interreligious Council
Smvs Shri Swaminarayan Mandir
Sri Krishna Balram Mandir
Standwithus
Temple Emanu-el
The Avanti Foundation
The Jewish Coalition of Berkeley
The Khalsa Today
Thinc Foundation
Thrilokya
United Hindu Coalition of Cc
United Hindu Council
United Nations Association of the United States of America, Inland Empire, California
Utsav Sacramento
Valley Indian Seniors Association
Vedic Dharma Samaj
Vijay's Sherawali Temple
Voice of Cupertino Desi
Yoga Bharati

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/28/25)

California Family Council
Church State Council
The Intersection of Faith & Culture
Lighthouse Baptist Church

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: According to the Hindu American Foundation, “AB 268 will help foster an environment of inclusiveness and pluralism in California by officially acknowledging and honoring the religious and historical significance of Diwali. It will help increase inter-religious and cultural understanding about California’s Hindu American population and Indian American Community.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: According to the Church State Council, “unlike many Christian Organizations, the Church State council believes strongly that it is not the government’s role to promote religions, or to favor any religion above any other. For example, we are opposed to Christian Nationalism or any kind of religious nationalism. Nor is it government’s role to recognize a religious holy day, like Diwali, as a state holiday. Our opposition to this bill is not based on any animus toward Hinduism. In fact, we believe in religious freedom for all people, even those with no faith at all, and our legal services arm provides representation to people regardless of their faith. And we are consistent in our stance, recently opposing a bill in Utah that made Easter Sunday a state holiday there, for the same reasons that we are opposing this bill.”

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0, 6/2/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: DeMaio

Prepared by: Felipe Lopez / G.O. / (916) 651-1530
8/29/25 20:33:23

**** END ****