

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 268 (Kalra and Patel)

As Amended June 13, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

This bill would add Diwali to the list of state holidays, authorizes public schools and community colleges to close on Diwali, and authorizes state employees to elect to take specified leave in recognition of Diwali.

Major Provisions:

- 1) Adds "Diwali," the 15th day of the month of Kartik in the Hindu lunar calendar of each year, 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) States legislative findings and declarations.

Senate Amendments

Make various legislative findings as to the significance of Diwali.

COMMENTS*Background.*

According to information provided by the author's office, Diwali, a festival of great significance to Indian Americans and South Asian Americans, is celebrated annually by Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains of all ethnic backgrounds throughout the United States and across the globe. It is also considered India's most important holiday and is typically celebrated around mid-October and ends in mid-November.

The word "Diwali" is a shortened version of the Sanskrit term "Deepavali," which means a row of lamps. Diwali, a five-day festival of lights, during which celebrants light small oil lamps and place them around the home. In addition to the spectacular lights, the festival is marked by firecrackers, traditional sweets, and the exchange of gifts. Like most celebrations worldwide, food is also a major part of the holiday, especially sweets such as jalebi (a fried bread soaked in syrup) and barfi (a fudge made with condensed milk and other flavors like pistachio). In 2025, Diwali will be observed on Monday, October 20.

Specifically, Hindu celebrants of Diwali believe that the rows of lamps symbolize the light of knowledge and truth within the individual that signifies the destruction of all negative qualities – be they violence, anger, jealousy, ignorance, greed, fear, or suffering. In other words, Diwali celebrates the victory of good over evil.

For Sikhs, Diwali coincides with Bandi Chhor Divas, meaning Day of Liberation, marking the day that the sixth founding Sikh Guru, revered teacher Guru Hargobind, was released from captivity by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir after wrongful imprisonment. For Jains, it marks the anniversary of the attainment of moksha, or liberation, by Mahavira, the last of the Tirthankaras (the great teachers of Jain dharma), at the end of his life in 527 B.C. For Buddhists, especially Newar Buddhists, Diwali is commemorated as Ashok Vijayadashami, the day the great Emperor Ashoka embraced Buddhism as his faith.

Diwali is known for uniting families, friends, and communities across California, the United States, and around the world, fostering goodwill, peace, and a collective sense of renewal."

According to the Author

According to the author, "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."

Arguments in Support

According to the Hindu American Foundation, "AB 268 would recognize the religious and historical significance of the festival of Diwali, or Deepawali. Diwali is a festival of deep significance to Indian Americans and South Asian Americans, and is celebrated annually by Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains of all ethnic backgrounds throughout California, the United States, and across the globe. The bill 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

The Pacific Justice Institute – Center for Public Policy writes (PJI-CPP), " While PJI-CPP acknowledges both the cultural and religious importance of Diwali to Indian Americans and South Asian communities, including Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains, we have significant concerns about the bill's significant implications for parental authority as well as its potential to exacerbate perceptions of anti-Christian bias within California's public education system. California's public schools must foster an environment that respects parental rights and religious diversity without favoring one faith over another."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Committee on Appropriations analysis:

- 1) 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 the bill.

- 2) 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.
- 3) 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.
- 4) Unknown, potentially absorbable costs to the California Department of Human Resources to update holiday policies.

VOTES:"

ASM GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION: 19-0-3

YES: Blanca Rubio, Davies, Alvarez, Berman, Bryan, Dixon, Fong, Gabriel, Gipson, McKinnor, Nguyen, Pacheco, Ramos, Michelle Rodriguez, Sanchez, Solache, Soria, Valencia, Wallis

ABS, ABST OR NV: Carrillo, DeMaio, Ta

ASM PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT AND RETIREMENT: 7-0-0

YES: McKinnor, Lackey, Alanis, Boerner, Elhawary, Garcia, Nguyen

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0-1

YES: 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

ABS, ABST OR NV: DeMaio

UPDATED

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