



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 164

Resolution calling upon the New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students

By Council Members Lee, Ung, Krishnan, Won, Hanif, Schulman, Hudson, Brewer, Ossé, Louis, Joseph, Nurse, Kagan, Menin, Marte, Fariás, Williams, Holden, Brooks-Powers, Dinowitz, The Speaker (Council Member Adams), Richardson Jordan, Bottcher, Abreu, Avilés, Riley, Sanchez, Rivera, Velázquez, Narcisse, Hanks, Powers, Yeager, Gennaro, Ariola, Carr, Paladino, Vernikov and the Public Advocate (Mr. Williams)

Whereas, According to the U.S. Census Bureau's latest American Religious Identification Survey in 2008, there were 582,000 Hindus, 78,000 Sikhs, and 1,189,000 Buddhists in the United States; and

Whereas, According to the 2015-2019 American Community Survey, there were about 227,374 New York City residents who identify themselves as Asian Indian, of which many are adherents of Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, or Buddhism; and

Whereas, Diwali, a five-day festival that typically falls between October and November and corresponds with the New Year in the Bikrami calendar, is an immensely significant festival across South Asia that celebrates the triumph of light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance; and

Whereas, Diwali is commonly known as the Festival of Lights, with celebrants lighting millions of lanterns, symbols of inner light and of the triumph of good over evil; and

Whereas, Hindus in certain regions of India celebrate Diwali as the New Year; and

Whereas, For Sikhs, Diwali coincides with Bandi Chhor Divas, the day Hargobind, the revered sixth Guru, was released from captivity; and

Whereas, For Jains, Diwali marks the anniversary of the attainment of moksha, or liberation, by Mahavira, who was the last of the Tirthankaras, or the great teachers of Jain dharma; and

Whereas, Some Buddhists celebrate Diwali to commemorate the day King Ashok converted to Buddhism; and

Whereas, Despite the large number of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists in New York City, Diwali is not recognized as a school holiday in the New York City public school system; and

Whereas, Since 2005, the United States House of Representatives and the Senate have passed multiple resolutions recognizing the religious and historical significance of Diwali, and in 2013 hosted the first-ever Congressional Diwali celebration; and

Whereas, Since 2003, the White House has held an annual Diwali celebration; and

Whereas, New York City has already acknowledged the significance of Diwali by suspending alternate side parking rules on Lakshmi Puja, the third and most important day of the holiday; and

Whereas, Currently, New York City public schools are closed on several religious holidays; and

Whereas, It should be noted that Chancellor's Regulation A-630 puts forth guidelines regarding the provision of reasonable accommodations for religious observance and practices for public school students; and

Whereas, Pursuant to Regulation A-630, reasonable accommodations include excused absences for religious observance outside of school grounds, as well as in-school provisions such as time for praying or sitting separately in the cafeteria during periods in which a student may fast; and

Whereas, Despite the intentions behind this regulation, many parents, students, and advocates have expressed concern that students who celebrate Diwali are still left at a disadvantage, having to choose between celebrating an important holiday or being absent from school, which can result in these students falling behind their peers, missing lessons and tests, and having lower attendance records; and

Whereas, Other American localities with growing Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist populations have incorporated Diwali into their school holiday calendars, including Passaic and South Brunswick in New Jersey and East Meadow School District, East Williston Union Free School District, Half Hollow Hills Central School District, Herricks Union Free School District, Hicksville Union Free School District and Syosset Central

School District. Another, Mineola Union Free School District; and

Whereas, New York City is a diverse and dynamic locality in which tolerance and acceptance are central values, and the incorporation of Diwali as a public school holiday would serve as an important embodiment of this tolerance and acceptance; and

Whereas, The New York City Department of Education has authority over the school calendar and, as a matter of policy, can incorporate Diwali as an observed holiday; and

Whereas, Furthermore, while campaigning, Mayor Adams declared that Diwali should be a school holiday; and

Whereas, It is time for the Mayor to fulfill this promise; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students.

Session 12

EB

LS 8707

05.05.2022

Session 11

LS 884/Res. 568-2015

LS 1125/Res. 0146-2018

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