Legislation Details (With Text)

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

Sponsors:

Indexes:

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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
7/24/2013	*	City Council	Introduced by Council	
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12/31/2013	*	City Council	Filed (End of Session)	

Res. No. 1863

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 Dromm, Dickens, Barron, Chin, Comrie, Gentile, James, Koo, Koslowitz, Mendez, Palma, Richards, Rose, Rodriguez and Halloran

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 Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey, there were 207,414 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 begins on the 13th day of the Hindu month of Kartik (October/November), is the most important festival on the Hindu calendar, celebrating the triumph of good over evil and marking the New Year; and

Whereas, Diwali is commonly known as the Festival of Lights, with celebrants lighting millions of lanterns, symbols of knowledge and inner light, to dispel ignorance and darkness; and

Whereas, For Sikhs, Diwali is the day the Mughal Emperor released Hargobind, the revered sixth Guru, 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, In 2007, the United States House of Representatives passed a resolution recognizing the religious and historical significance of Diwali, and since 2009, 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

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; 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.

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JA
7/16/2013

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