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Res. No. 795

Resolution calling on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, legislation to designate Kwanzaa as a public holiday in New York

By Council Members Williams and Banks

Whereas, New York State (NYS) Assembly bill A.2705, introduced on January 26, 2023, by State Assembly Member Alicia Hyndman, and companion Senate bill S.7899, introduced on January 3, 2024, by State Senator Kevin Parker, would have designated the seven-day period of time beginning December 26 and ending on January 1, known as Kwanzaa, as a public holiday in NYS; and

Whereas, Kwanzaa is an African American and Pan-African holiday honoring African history, culture, family, and community; and

Whereas, The word Kwanzaa comes from the Swahili *matunda ya kwanza*, or first fruits, and refers to the harvest festivals celebrated in Africa; and

Whereas, Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor and chair of Africana Studies at California State University, Long Beach, and founder and executive director of the African American Cultural Center; and

Whereas, In his annual Kwanzaa message in December 2024, Karenga wrote that, during Kwanzaa, "we practice the ritual of candle lighting called 'lifting up the light that lasts,' based not only in the history of our people in practice, but also from the sacred teachings of our ancestors"; and

Whereas, Karenga further explained that the candle lighting ceremony is "a lighting of the lasting light of *Nguzo Saba*," or The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa, which are *Umoja* (unity), *Kujichagulia* (self-determination), *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility), *Ujamaa* (cooperative economics), *Nia* (purpose),

Kuumba (creativity), and *Imani* (faith); and

Whereas, Each principle is celebrated on one of the seven days of Kwanzaa, and there are seven symbols arranged on a table at the start of Kwanzaa, which are fruits, nuts, and vegetables; a straw mat; ears of corn; seven candles; a candleholder; a communal cup; and gifts; and

Whereas, The colors of Kwanzaa are red, commemorating the struggles of Africans; black, representing the Earth and the African people; and green, symbolizing hope for the future; and

Whereas, These colors are represented in the seven candles in the *kinara* (Swahili, for candleholder), with one black candle in the middle and with three red and three green candles on the sides, one of which is lit on each day of Kwanzaa; and

Whereas, Karenga further noted that Kwanzaa is celebrated "with feasts (*karamu*), music, dance, poetry, and narratives," ending with a day of "reflection and recommitment to The Seven Principles and other central cultural values"; and

Whereas, Karenga wrote about that recommitment, stating that "our task remains and cannot be other than to lift up the light in the midst of the night that surrounds us and hurry the dawn, to keep the fires for freedom burning thru constant and conscientious struggle, to love each other in the midst of the hatred directed toward us, to defend and give power to the vulnerable, to bear witness to truth[,] to love justice, to hate wrongdoing and always do what is good"; and

Whereas, In 1993, President William J. Clinton was the first United States (U.S.) president to issue a statement on the occasion of Kwanzaa, in which he wrote that "[a]t a time when we are seeking ways to revitalize our neighborhoods and empower those who have been powerless for too long, Kwanzaa encourages us to rebuild and gives us the opportunity to celebrate the strengths of the African American community"; and

Whereas, In 2012, U.S. President Barack Obama wrote that "Kwanzaa serves as a time of reflection: taking lessons learned from our past and looking forward to a more promising tomorrow" and that "we must recommit ourselves to building a country where all Americans have the opportunity to achieve their dreams";

and

Whereas, Making Kwanzaa a public holiday for all New Yorkers statewide would reaffirm NYS's commitment to diversity, while designating a time for celebrating and preserving African Americans' heritage and honoring their contributions to the cultural, political, and economic life of all New Yorkers; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, legislation to designate Kwanzaa as a public holiday in New York.

LS #18609
3/3/2025
RHP