



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Leroy Comrie

## Lawmakers and Leaders Push for Recognition of Diwali as a State Holiday

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### LAWMAKERS AND LEADERS PUSH FOR RECOGNITION OF DIWALI AS A STATE HOLIDAY

*Senator Comrie and Assembly Member Miller Take the Lead for Cultural Inclusion*

(Jamaica, N.Y. -- June 6th, 2015) Senator Leroy Comrie (D-Hollis), religious organizations and community leaders held a press conference in support of [Senate Bill S5304](#) and [Assembly Bill A4331](#), which would establish Diwali as an official public school holiday.

**Senator Leroy Comrie (D-Hollis)**, the prime sponsor of Senate Bill S5304, stated: “Just as Diwali symbolizes a renewal of faith and a victory of light over darkness for those of the Indian community, here in Queens and New York State, immigrants come from all over the world to find new beginnings. I am proud to carry a bill infused with a spirit of diversity and inclusivity, and to commit myself to integrating the South Asian community’s rich heritage into the greater culture of this State.”

**Assemblyman Michael Miller (D-Woodhaven)**, the prime sponsor of Assembly Bill A4331, stated, “As the prime sponsor of this bill, it is my sincerest belief that by recognizing Diwali, not only are we respecting one of India’s most significant holidays, but we are truly recognizing and highlighting the cultural diversity and tolerance we have in Queens. That is what truly sets us apart from other communities and something we embrace tremendously. The South-Asian Community is one of the most vibrant emerging communities and it is a privilege to be able to collaborate with them on this. “

**Dr. Mohammed Hack**, President of the Inter-Faith Council for Community Development and community activist, praised the bill: “Just as all faiths are protected by the law of the land, equally so should all be able to enjoy the holidays that tie our cultures together. I want to commend Senator Comrie and Assemblyman Miller for their committed effort to ensure a breakthrough for those celebrating Diwali, so they will be able to enjoy that time with their families.”

Diwali is holiday that is observed by people of Hindu, Jain and Sikh faiths. According to the most recent census, there are approximately 207,414 New York City residents who identify themselves as Asian Indian, of whom many celebrate Diwali. Millions of people around the world keep Diwali by lighting lamps to symbolize righteousness and light overcoming and dispelling ignorance and darkness. It is a five-day festival that begins on the 13th day of the Hindu month of Kartik. Observers of the holiday spend time with their loved ones and

priests, performing prayers and other rituals.

Diwali is a recognized holiday in New York City; every year, alternate-side parking rules are suspended in recognition of the holiday and those who celebrate it. However, Diwali is not recognized as a holiday for schools or City workers. On February 12th of this year, New York City Council Member Daniel Dromm introduced a [City Council Resolution](#), urging the Department of Education to approve a proposal to make Diwali an official school holiday, and wrote a letter to Chancellor Fariña requesting recognition of Diwali as a school holiday. The letter was co-signed by his Council colleagues Inez Barron, Margaret Chin, Costa Constantinides, Inez Dickens, Corey Johnson, Peter Koo, Mark Levine, Rosie Mendez, I. Daneek Miller, Annabel Palma, Paul Vallone and Mark Weprin. Since then, official recognition of Diwali has gained traction on the State level, where Senators Martin Dilan, Jesse Hamilton, Ruth Hassell-Thompson, Jose Peralta, John Sampson and Toby Stavisky and Assembly Member David Weprin have signed on as co-sponsors of each respective bill.

"I am proud to support State Senator Leroy Comrie's legislation, which seeks to recognize the celebration of Diwali as a public holiday," said **Congress Member Gregory Meeks (D-Jamaica)**.

"Diwali is the beginning of the Hindu New Year, and signifies the start of a time of reflection and gratitude for health, knowledge, and prosperity. This legislation underscores the importance of the Festival of Lights to so many in our community and the cultural diversity which makes our City so great."

**Senator Toby Ann Stavisky (D-Flushing)** commended efforts to recognize Diwali statewide: "I am proud to join Senator Comrie and Assemblyman Miller to co-sponsor this bill that celebrates the growing cultural and religious diversity of our state. Diwali is the most important holiday for many Hindu, Sikh and Jain New Yorkers and it is time that it is officially recognized. Our state has a long history of religious and cultural tolerance and recognizing the importance of Diwali is the next step in that tradition."

"It is only fair that we recognize Diwali as a public school holiday. The Festival of Lights is another example of how diverse our great Empire is. And this is a holiday widely celebrated in my district," said **Senator Jose Peralta (D-East Elmhurst)**, co-sponsor of the bill.

"The people of this great State are proud of our Indian-American and South Asian neighbors for their incredible service and positive contributions to our communities," said **Assembly Member David I. Weprin (D-Richmond Hill)**. "I wholeheartedly applaud these fine measures introduced by our State Legislature that continue to foster stronger cultural diversity, as well as add richness and quality to our lives here."

"The allocation of Diwali as a public holiday will serve to promote inclusiveness and ensure that people of the Hindu faith are properly represented in the tapestry that is New York," said **Council Member I. Daneek Miller (D-Jamaica)**. "These are hardworking men and women of a growing population who deserve to observe their religious holidays in a manner consistent with their faith. In honoring the beautiful celebration of Diwali on our calendar we enrich the lives of all New Yorkers."

"As our city becomes increasingly more diverse, we need to recognize the significant holy days of all our residents," **Council Member Donovan Richards (D-Laurelton)** said. "Students cannot afford to miss school days and it is not right to ask families to ignore their beliefs simply because the state fails to acknowledge one of our emerging communities. I commend Senator Comrie for introducing this bill and I stand with him in calling on Albany to recognize Diwali as a public holiday."

The bill is currently pending a vote in the Senate's Judiciary Committee.

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