

# **Government Administration and Elections Committee**

## **JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT**

**Bill No.:** SB-1519

**Title:** AN ACT DESIGNATING VARIOUS DAYS, WEEKS AND MONTHS.

**Vote Date:** 3/26/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/21/2025

**File No.:**

**Disclaimer:** *The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

### **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Government Administration and Elections Committee

### **CO-SPONSORS OF SB-1519**

Rep. Tom Delnicki, 14th Dist.  
Sen. Ceci Maher, 26th Dist.  
Rep. Kathy Kennedy, 119th Dist.  
Rep. Savet Constantine, 42nd Dist.  
Rep. William Heffernan, 115th Dist.  
Rep. Jonathan Jacobson, 148th Dist.  
Rep. Josh Elliott, 88th Dist.  
Rep. Kerry S. Wood, 29th Dist.  
Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.  
Rep. Gary A. Turco, 27th Dist.  
Rep. Robin E. Comey, 102nd Dist.

### **REASONS FOR BILL:**

To honor various groups with a special day or month on the Connecticut calendar

### **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

None Expressed

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Tom Delnicki, Representative 14<sup>th</sup> District, Connecticut:**

My testimony is specifically for Section (135), lines 102 thru 106. I strongly support adding Diwali in statutes to recognize its importance in Connecticut. South Windsor has a flourishing Indian American community, and the cultural diversity makes us stronger. We celebrate the holiday in all our public schools. Diwali is annual celebration of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and the blessings of victory, freedom, and enlightenment.

### **Tammy Exum, Representative 19<sup>th</sup> District, Connecticut:**

When designating April 26<sup>th</sup> as Tuskegee Airman Day, you recognize the accomplishments of the Tuskegee Airmen, the first black military airmen group in American history. April 26<sup>th</sup> would also serve an educational component in remembering the achievements of the Airmen. Connecticut has connections to the Tuskegee with several families who had members that served. The New England Air Museum has added on the Connecticut Freedom trail after the opening of its permanent exhibit "Tuskegee Airman". Declaring April 26<sup>th</sup> Tuskegee Airman Day will go hand in hand with the CT Freedom Trail and the New England Air Museum in the education of students and residents about this important part of our history.

### **Kate Farrar, 20<sup>th</sup> District, Connecticut**

### **Kevin Brown 56<sup>th</sup> District, Connecticut**

### **Mary Fortier, 79<sup>th</sup> District, Connecticut:**

We are testifying specifically on Section 123 to designate the first Wednesday in May as Local Journalism Appreciation Day. Local news is a vital part of our communities and democracy. Our local news organizations are disappearing, and this loss contributes to the rise of misinformation, corruption, low voter turnout, and low civic engagement. By establishing an appreciation day, we can recognize the importance of and the contributions of local journalism.

### **Tami Zawistowski, 61<sup>st</sup> District, Connecticut:**

I am supporting two subdivisions under Section 1. The first is section 119 on designating February 14<sup>th</sup> as Neurofibromatosis Awareness Day. As a relatively uncommon condition, it has been overlooked in favor of more common diseases. The prominent fundraising effort is Cupid's Undie Run held on the weekend around Valentines Day. There needs to be more awareness and public attention and an urgent need for a cure. I also support Section 122 making April 26<sup>th</sup> Tuskegee Airmen Day. It passed in the House last year but not the Senate.

### **Matthew Lesser, Senator 9<sup>th</sup> District, Connecticut:**

I am testifying in support of the bill, specifically Sections 134 and 135. Epilepsy Awareness month is a step in increasing the public understanding of epilepsy. The recognition would help combat the stigmas, promote awareness of treatment options, and encourage conversations with those who have epilepsy. Recognizing the fifteenth day of Kartik as Diwali celebrates Connecticut's diverse cultural landscape. Acknowledging this holiday honors the cultural heritage of Connecticut's Hindu community, reduces prejudice, and fosters a more inclusive connective community through shared celebration.

**Cathy Osten, Senator 19<sup>th</sup> District, Connecticut:**

I support the bill especially, May 5<sup>th</sup> as Red Dress Day. This day commemorates missing and murdered indigenous women and children. We need to shine a light on these ignored and under reported tragedies.

**Stephanie Abrams, President & CEO New England Air Museum:**

I support designating April 26<sup>th</sup> as Tuskegee Airman Day in Connecticut. In the museum we show personal stories of the families who stood beside them and the hardships they endured. these are real men with an extraordinary legacy of perseverance and conviction who changed the course of history. Connecticut has its own ties to these heroes as Lemuel r. Curtis, Hartford's first Black police officer and one of the first five Tuskegee fighter pilots who returned home. He also served in our state government. Our own former State Treasurer, Denise Nappier, is the daughter and niece of Tuskegee Airmen. Establishing April 25<sup>th</sup> will affirm their legacy will never fade into the history books but live on in our classrooms and communities.

**David Pettigrew, Connecticut State University Professor, SCSU:**

I created a course on Holocaust and Genocide Studies in 2013. My students learn about the heroic efforts of Vaian Fry in Marseille to rescue Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis. Designating October 15<sup>th</sup> as Varian Fry Day will bring awareness about his righteous deeds and encourage education to include information about Fry in their classes.

**Jeremie Butliien, Director, CT Voices of Hope:**

Varian Fry was a former teacher in Redding and a resident of Ridgefield, Connecticut and he played a crucial role in rescuing Jewish refugees during World War II. During a visit to Berlin, he witnessed the SS assaulting a Jewish man. Later in Marseille, France he established the ERC (Emergency Rescue Committee) between 1940 and 1941 where he orchestrated the escape of approximately 2,000 Jewish refugees to the United States. His efforts saved prominent artists, writers, and intellectuals, including, Marc Chagall, Jacques Lipschitz, Hanna Arendt, Franz Werfel, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Heinrich Mann. Recognizing Varian Fry on October 15<sup>th</sup> increases demand for examples of righteous individuals and ordinary citizens who stood against Nazi atrocities.

**Keana Crisculo, student, Southern Connecticut State University:**

I am taking the class with Professor David Pettigrew because of my fascination of people and their experiences with the cruelties of the Holocaust. I did not know Varian Fry was a Connecticut resident, as I am sure many are not aware of who he is or what he accomplished. His story is of courage and selflessness, and designating a day in his honor is only fitting. October 15<sup>th</sup> should be declared as Varian Fry Day.

**Sarah Snyder, Goodwin University:**

I previously served as the Director of the Holocaust Education Resource and Outreach, and I have integrated Varian Fry's rescue mission into my curriculum at various Connecticut institutions. Following Public Act No. 18-24, mandating Holocaust and genocide education in our schools should include Varian Fry's journey and what he witnessed firsthand should be honored, ensuring that his legacy of moral courage continues.

**Bekir Hodzic, Junior, Vassar College:**

Varian Fry was Connecticut resident who Yad Vashem titled, "One of the righteous among the nations" for saving over 1500 Jewish refugees during the Holocaust. October 15<sup>th</sup> would honor a man who risked so much to save a people threatened by purposeful extinction and one who answered the call that many did not answer.

**Christopher Cusano, CEO CT Brain Tumor Alliance:**

As someone who has experienced the impact of a brain tumor, I can attest there is a greater need for understanding, awareness, and resources to address this issue. I am requesting that you consider including the Month of May as Brain Tumor Awareness Month to mirror the congressional resolution that Congress passed in 2008.

**Microbiome Therapeutics Innovation Group:**

We support Section 1, lines 63 to 71 of the bill establishing June 27<sup>th</sup> as Connecticut Microbiome Day. We hope this will highlight and promote the transformative potential of microbiome science and its role in combating diseases. Connecticut is a leader in microbiome research and innovation. Raising public awareness should encourage student engagement in STEM fields and emerging biomedical sciences.

**David Fortier, Executive Editor, Bristol Edition:**

Section 123 of the bill creates a Local Journalism Appreciation Day. As a former journalism teacher, it is easy to see the negative effects of a diminished local news presence. Local Journalism Appreciation Day will reinforce efforts to provide our young people the opportunity to contribute to a nationwide effort to encourage local news and showcase the necessity of it.

**Rajeev Pahuja:**

I have spearheaded Diwali becoming a ceremonial bi-partisan state holiday. As a continental Empowerment volunteer team, we have received approximately 15 Diwali proclamations issued by municipalities in 2024. In October of 2024, support was given from Wilton Hindu Temple Priest and founder Swami Balgopal Bhiramchari for Diwali to be a holiday in Connecticut. Diwali is an inclusive American holiday for everyone symbolizing light over darkness, good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, and new beginnings. This bill will help create cultural awareness, promote inclusivity, and recognize one of the most sacred days of the year for 3.6 million residents in Connecticut. Included in my testimony are the names, addresses and e-mails of over 300 people in support of making Diwali a ceremonial state holiday.

**Swami Balgopal Bhirmachari:**

As a member of American Hindu RCO, I represent thousands of residents. Celebrating Diwali is one of the most important and widely celebrated festivals in the world. Recognizing Diwali as an official ceremonial holiday would strengthen our belief in Vasudaiva Kutumbakam (one Family). There are economic benefits in that many businesses cater to the South Asian community and sales increase during this time. Consider the positive impact of officially recognizing Diwali as a ceremonial holiday. This is the matter of celebrating the diversity that makes our state stronger and more vibrant.

**Gaurav Borad:**

For many families Diwali is a time of togetherness, reflection, and joy. The lack of formal recognition makes it difficult for individuals, especially students and working professionals, to

fully participate in this important celebration. Recognizing at the state level would honor the cultural and religious diversity in Connecticut.

**Thiru Raman:**

Making Diwali a holiday is affirmation of our global shared human values. Diwali transcends religious boundaries. At its core message, light over darkness and good over evil is universally relevant. Over 15 nations celebrate Diwali as a public holiday and Connecticut should join them.

**Ashish Bordia:**

As a resident of Darien, I wish to see Diwali declared as an official ceremonial state holiday. Interfaith celebrations make living in a state unique as we embrace and celebrate diverse traditions. This strengthens our community and forges deeper connections as we celebrate shared values of love, compassion, and unity.

**Pryanka Joshi, Prateek Jaiswal:**

As residents of Wiltion they want to see Diwali recognized as a state ceremonial holiday. Many other states and school districts across the country recognize Diwali. This bill will present an opportunity for Connecticut to lead by example in celebrating its diverse population.

**Ram Avvari:**

I urge the committee to support this initiative and honor our South Asian communities by setting an example for other to follow.

**The following also submitted testimony is support of Diwali:**

Mahesh Jhangiani – President GOPIO CT

Suman Mahlotra

Janak Parekh

Vijay Patel

Chandra Bhat

Bankim Desai

Shilpa Gohil

Binoy Singh

Ankur Thaker

Tejal Vallam

Manish Maheshwari

Anonymous

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Dan Clemons submitted testimony in opposition to the bill.**

**Reported by: Pamela Bianca**

**Date: March 28, 2025**