



**SB 350 – Student Support for Mental Health and Bereavement**  
*Increasing Support Time for Students Dealing with Grief*

**SUMMARY**

In California, students who experience the death of a loved one are excused from school for only one day for an in-state funeral, or up to three school days for an out of state funeral.

This is simply not enough time for children to begin to heal. To allow for additional time to grieve, SB 350 increases the amount of days that a student can be excused from school from one to five days, when the absence is for attending funeral services, grieving the death of the student’s immediate family member, or obtaining victim services for violence or abuse.

**BACKGROUND**

California's education law requires every child between the ages of 6 through 18 to attend school full-time. A student who is absent from school without a valid excuse on any day, or who is tardy for more than 30 minutes, or any combination thereof, for three days in a school year is considered truant.

Students of color – especially African American and Native American students – have higher rates of unexcused absences from school than their white peers, which can lead to disciplinary consequences that can further disrupt their education.<sup>1</sup> This discrepancy can lead to higher rates of truancy for students of color, which is associated with a host of negative consequences.<sup>2</sup>

Last year, Assemblymember Evan Low authored AB 1949, which allowed up to five days of unpaid, job-protected bereavement leave for both public and private employees upon the death of a spouse, child, parent, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, domestic partner, or parent-in-law. However, this bill focused only on employees in the workplace and did not address bereavement leave for students.

Current law establishes excused absences for a number of reasons, but when a student attends a funeral service, they receive only one day of excused leave. SB 350 seeks to address this discrepancy by allowing students to also receive up to 5 days of excused leave.

**THE PROBLEM**

One out of five children in the United States are grieving the death of someone close to them. Only allowing a student one day of excused absences for the death of a family member does not allow the student enough time to physically or emotionally mourn their loss. Existing law only allows for the time to physically travel to and from the funeral service, but does not allow for grieving or time spent with family that is not centered on a funeral. Funeral services are very traumatic for all parties involved, but especially children, and taking the necessary time to recover and mourn is imperative to the health and well-being of loved ones.

Unaddressed childhood grief and trauma is associated with long-term health problems, mental illness, and substance abuse. Additionally, severe abuse in childhood can cause stress that disrupts brain and physical development, increasing the risk for numerous health problems in adulthood, such as heart disease, cancer, substance abuse, and mental illness. These potential effects further emphasize the need for students who experience severely traumatic experiences to receive victim services, participate in safety planning, or take time off in order to grieve.

However, because current law only allows students one day of excused absences for funeral services, and does not allow for any days of excused absences to receive victim services, students are rushing back to school so as to not be penalized for truancy.

**THE SOLUTION**

SB 350 seeks to support students in their grief and ensure they receive the necessary time off after violence or abuse by allowing up to 5 days of excused absences from school for the purposes of:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.courts.ca.gov/23904.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

- Attending funeral services;
- Grieving the death of the student's immediate family member or close friend;
- Obtaining victim services; or
- Participating in safety planning as it relates to violence or abuse.

While no amount of time can replace the hole created by the loss of a family member, SB 350 gives students a full school week of excused absences, as opposed to a single day, to address grief and avoid the negative consequences associated with truancy.

### **SUPPORT**

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Californians for Safety and Justice (co-sponsor)  
Generation Up (co-sponsor)  
Attorney General Rob Bonta  
Anti-Recidivism Coalition  
California Catholic Conference  
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence  
California State Association of Psychiatrists  
Catron Academy Learning Institute  
Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice  
Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice  
John Burton Advocates for Youth  
Nat'l Association of Social Workers, CA Chapter  
Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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