



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
Toby Ann Stavisky

Senator Stavisky and Assemblyman Kim Applaud Passage of School Holiday Bill

TOBY ANN STAVISKY May 13, 2014

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, NEW YORK CITY, YOUTH**



Albany, NY—The New York State Senate today passed S.6688, a bill that would allow the New York City Department of Education to close schools on days where a considerable portion of students are likely to be absent because of a cultural or religious holiday.

The Assembly companion bill A.7756, sponsored by Assemblyman Ron Kim (D-Flushing), passed on February 3, 2014.

The bill was inspired by Senator Toby Ann Stavisky (D-Flushing) and Assemblyman Kim's work with community groups and school leaders in Flushing, Queens. As the bill states, 23% of the 2.2 million residents in Queens County are Asian. In Flushing, that percentage jumps to 57%.

Senator Stavisky and Assemblyman Kim quickly saw the importance of closing schools on holidays such as Lunar New Year to respect the traditions of Asian culture, but also as a cost-saving measure for schools who otherwise would be wasting resources staying open when a significant portion of the school population is absent.

"The passage of S.6688 is a tremendous step forward for religious and cultural equality in our state. All Americans—whether they are Chinese, Korean, Hindu, or from any other background—deserve the freedom to observe important religious and cultural holidays without fear of harming their children's education," said **Senator Stavisky**, one of the bill's co-sponsors. "I thank my colleagues in the Legislature for passing this important bill and urge the Governor to give all New Yorkers the cultural and religious respect they deserve."

"I am proud that our Senate is passing S.6688. It is incredibly important for our communities to accept and embrace all cultures and to celebrate and appreciate our diversity. Lunar New Year is one of the most significant cultural holidays for Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and other Asian ethnic groups," said **Assemblyman Kim**. "This Bill allows school districts more freedom to accommodate the needs of their students. It will provide relief to students and families throughout the city who often struggle with pulling their kids out of school on important, though not nationally recognized, holidays. I urge the governor to sign this legislation into law. This is a step toward making sure that public policy reflects New York City's cultural and religious diversity."

"Every and each year, Chinese American students and parents welcome their Lunar New Year in a difficult way. It is difficult because this tradition should have been celebrated simply, but they either have to ask for leave or must go to school for exams. On the behalf of Chinese American parents, we thank the New York State Senate and Assembly for their leadership in responding to this concern with sensibility and understanding. May those who celebrate the Lunar New Year be able to do so," said **Pauline Chu, President of the Chinese-American Parents Association**.

The bill would go into effect immediately pending the Governor's signature.

To read the full text of the bill, visit

<http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/bill/S6688-2013>