

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2209

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Relations

Title: An act relating to celebrating lunar new year.

Brief Description: Celebrating lunar new year.

Sponsors: Representatives Thai, Ryu, Gregerson, Senn, Santos, Ramel, Reeves, Morgan, Reed, Fosse, Cortes, Macri, Doglio, Paul, Pollet and Riccelli.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 1/16/24, 1/19/24 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Designates the Lunar New Year as a legislatively recognized day.
- Encourages governmental entities and educational and cultural organizations to celebrate the Lunar New Year.
- Requires the State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs to create programming and resources for entities to use in their celebrations.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Ramos, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Cheney, Ranking Minority Member; Christian, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gregerson, Low and Mena.

Staff: Jason Zolle (786-7124).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Lunar New Year.

The Lunar New Year is a celebration of the arrival of spring and the beginning of a new year. It is a significant holiday in many East and Southeast Asian cultures, including in Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean communities. The beginning of the Lunar New Year varies by year, as it is tied to the lunar calendar based on the cycles of the moon, and the duration of the holiday varies by culture.

In the United States, the Lunar New Year is commonly associated with the Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival. This is typically a 15-day celebration beginning on the day of the second new moon after the winter solstice, which usually falls between the end of January and mid-February. In Vietnam, the holiday is known as Tet Nguyen Dan, also commonly referred to as Tet, whereas in Korea it is known as Seollal. In China, the holiday can be traced as far back as the Shang Dynasty (1600–1046 BCE) with its roots celebrating the end of the harvest and time to spend with family.

Each culture celebrates the Lunar New Year differently with various foods and traditions that symbolize prosperity, abundance, and togetherness. Among other traditions, people give offerings to ancestors and deities, often in the form of food and money, and hang red lanterns to welcome health, wealth, and good fortune in the new year.

State Holidays.

Washington recognizes 11 specific days as paid state legal holidays: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Juneteenth, Labor Day, Veterans' Day, Thanksgiving Day, Native American Heritage Day, and Christmas Day.

Another 19 specific days are recognized by the Legislature, but they are not considered legal holidays. Some of those days commemorate specific events, such as Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day. Other days commemorate groups of people, such as Korean-American Day, or certain ideas, such as Human Trafficking Awareness Day and Public Lands Day.

Summary of Bill:

The Lunar New Year is a legislatively recognized day. It is defined as the day of the second new moon following the winter solstice, or the third new moon following the winter solstice should an intercalary month intervene.

The Legislature encourages state governmental entities, local governments, schools and institutions of higher education, and cultural organizations to celebrate the Lunar New Year. The State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs is required to create Lunar New Year programming and resources for entities to use in planning and structuring their celebrations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Last year there was an attempt to make Lunar New Year a state legal holiday, but this bill is newly proposed as a legislatively recognized day instead. Lunar New Year is prominent on the calendars of many Asian countries, and Asian-American communities in Seattle find it important to celebrate the holiday. Recognizing Lunar New Year will acknowledge the cultural importance of the day for many Asian-Americans in Washington, and it will emphasize that they are Washingtonians and not foreigners. Other states have moved to recognize Lunar New Year in recent years. Asian-Americans are the largest growing racial minority in Washington and it is important to recognize their history and contribution to the state.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative My-Linh Thai, prime sponsor; Quynh Pham, Friends of Little Saigon; Carrie Huie, Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs; Lynne Robinson, City of Bellevue; Amy Chen Lozano, Organization of Chinese Americans—Greater Seattle; Faaluaina Pritchard, Asia Pacific Cultural Center; and Sun Buford.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.