

Members of the Health & Government Operations Committee, I am writing as a student from Baltimore County in favor of HB676. My name is Aarya Acharya and I am representing the Baltimore Association of Nepalese in America. I am a 9th grader who, as a Nepali American, celebrates the holiday "Dashain" around the fall time. Dashain is a holiday that many Nepali Americans in my community celebrate, but we are often faced with challenges every year while trying to.

Dashain is a very special holiday for me and many other students who live in Maryland. We often meet with many different people throughout the day and have specific activities to do. With all the fun that comes with the holiday, school has been scheduled for 7 of the 8 years that I celebrated during the school year. While doing the important activities on Dashain, I often feel a burden thinking about all of the work that I am missing. This burden becomes much more prominent as you start to get older and reach higher grade levels. Seeing the school systems not recognize my community and the holidays I celebrate make me feel like my community is neglected. Not respecting our traditions has not only affected Dashain, but is also leaving a negative precedent. It shows a poor reflection on our county and school system's ability to reach our needs.

If this bill is passed, students will not have school on Dashain. Not only would this remove that burden, it would also show my community that our school systems actually care. I see many other groups get proper representation, but Nepali residents still don't have the attention we need, even though our community is rapidly growing. Maryland has the fifth biggest Nepali population in the U.S, and Baltimore especially has a growing number of Nepali Americans.

If we continue to ignore the Nepali population and our needs, young children who celebrate Dashain will never see their culture as something that is recognized. Recognizing this holiday would be the first step in stopping this, and would help students enjoy Dashain the way it was originally intended to be celebrated. For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support HB676.