

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 615 (Senators Rosapepe and Zucker)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

General Provisions - Commemorative Days - Pongal Day

This bill requires the Governor to annually proclaim January 14 as Pongal Day.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Commemorating Pongal Day does not affect State finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Sixteen official commemorative days, six months, and one week are recognized in State law, as shown in **Exhibit 1**. The Governor also must issue a proclamation each year encouraging citizens and other individuals to observe a moment of silence at 3:00 p.m. on Memorial Day to unite in remembrance and commemorate the heroic acts and efforts of Marylanders who have served and died in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Exhibit 1
Official Commemorative Days and Months in Maryland

Asian Lunar New Year Day ¹	January/February
Black History Month	February
Irish-American Heritage Month	March
Women's History Month	March
Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day	March 30
Crime Victim and Advocate Commemorative Day	April 3
John Hanson's Birthday ²	April 13
National Healthcare Decisions Day	April 16
Maryland Centenarians Day ³	May
Negro Baseball League Day ⁴	May
Law Day U.S.A.	May 1
Fire, Rescue, and Emergency Services Workers Day ⁵	June
Chesapeake Bay Awareness Week ⁶	June
Juneteenth National Freedom Day	June 19
Maryland Charter Day	June 20
Thurgood Marshall Day	July 2
Hispanic Heritage Month ⁷	September/October
German-American Heritage Month	October
South Asian American Heritage Day	October 2
Poetry Day	October 15
American Indian Heritage Month	November
Maryland Emancipation Day	November 1
Annapolis Charter Day	December 17

¹Day designated as new year on the Asian lunar calendar.

²John Hanson served as the first president of the Continental Congress under the Articles of Confederation from 1781 to 1782.

³Commemorated on the second Thursday in May.

⁴Commemorated on the second Saturday in May.

⁵Commemorated on the first Sunday in June.

⁶Commemorated during the second week in June.

⁷Commemorated from September 15 to October 15.

Source: Department of Legislative Services

Background: In February 2017, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation to declare January 14 in 2018 and in each succeeding year as Pongal Day in Virginia. The bill is modeled after that legislation.

Pongal, also known as “Thai Pongal,” is a four-day religious and cultural festival celebrated in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu and by Tamils around the world, including Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and the United States. The festival involves a variety of Hindu religious rituals and customs, the specifics of which vary by region, to celebrate and give thanks for the seasonal harvest. The event begins on the first day of the tenth month of the Tamil calendar (“Thai”) and usually falls on the fourteenth or fifteenth of January.

Generally, the first day of the festival includes a bonfire and the disposing of unwanted household items to symbolize the welcoming of new things into one’s life; the second day involves the cooking of special foods, including a sweet rice that is boiled in milk; the third day celebrates the importance of cows to daily life with decorations and blessings; and the fourth and final day includes special blessings for the family.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 7,200 Maryland residents speak Tamil at home. Maryland also has a relatively high concentration of Tamil speakers compared with much of the country (between 0.5% and 1.4% of the State’s population).

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: SB 1199 of 2018 received a hearing in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, but no further action was taken. Its cross file, HB 1762, was referred to the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee, but no further action was taken.

Cross File: HB 1044 (Delegate Lierman, *et al.*) - Health and Government Operations.

Information Source(s): U.S. Census Bureau; www.pongalfestival.org; Department of Legislative Services

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mm/lgc

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