



MEMORANDUM

AGENDA MEMO

TO: Honorable Mayor, Members of the City Council and the Public

FROM: Councilmember Janani Ramachandran

DATE: March 10, 2026

SUBJECT: ADOPT A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF CALIFORNIA SENATE BILL 959
(GRAYSON)

RECOMMENDATION

ADOPT A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF CALIFORNIA SENATE BILL 959 (GRAYSON) WHICH WOULD (1) EMPOWER LOCAL FIRE OFFICIALS TO DETERMINE WHETHER CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS SHOULD CANCEL CLASSES DUE TO THE THREAT OF WILDFIRES, (2) ENSURE THAT SCHOOLS WOULD NOT LOSE AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE FUNDING FOR PREEMPTIVELY CANCELING CLASSES WHEN FACING WILDFIRE DANGER, AND (3) KEEP STUDENTS AND RESIDENTS IN OAKLAND AND NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES SAFE AS THE FREQUENCY AND SEVERITY OF WILDFIRES CONTINUES TO INCREASE STATEWIDE

LEGISLATION SUMMARY

Background

California has experienced an unprecedented rise in the frequency and severity of wildfires as the state faces the reality of a year-round fire season. Recent tragedies like the Eaton and Palisades fires in Southern California along with the Dixie and LNU Lightning Complex fires in Northern California have incentivized a series of actions aimed at learning from these tragic events. In addition, Oakland's own history of devastating wildfires – including the tragic and destructive 1991 Oakland Hills fire that cost the lives of 25 people and cost close to \$4 billion in present-day dollars – has made ensuring wildfire safety an enduring priority for the City going forward.

While the State Legislature has acted to rebuild impacted communities, bolster mitigation efforts, and lower future fire risk in response to recent devastating wildfires, more must be

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done to ensure that communities have every possible resource to effectively respond to the threat of wildfire danger.

One area where there remains a gap in current law is in the Education Code section that governs the type of emergency situations that a school may cancel classes and not lose out on Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funding. Currently, California's Education Code lists fire as one of the emergency instances where a school may cancel classes and not lose out on ADA funding, but the Code is unclear on whether schools could lose funding by taking preemptive action on school closures due to imminent fire danger. In addition, these decisions are usually left up to individual schools, who may not have the expertise to make an appropriate determination in the event of an impending wildfire.

Senate Bill 959 (Grayson)

California Senate Bill (SB) 959, introduced by Senator Tim Grayson and co-sponsored by several other legislators including our representatives Senator Jesse Arreguin and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, would ensure that schools would not lose ADA funding if proactive action were taken to close a school that is facing potential wildfire danger. In addition, SB 959 will address the gap in current law by empowering local fire agencies to make advance determinations on whether a school should close due to wildfire danger – agencies that have the experience and expertise to make accurate and informed determinations that will be guided by broad community safety.

The solutions provided by SB 959 are not only pragmatic but also have lifesaving ramifications to communities here in Oakland and throughout the state. Given that many schools are in residential neighborhoods, closing these schools when there is an impending threat would allow for residents to evacuate more quickly and firefighters to safely enter areas with limited ingress and egress – as well as keeping students, teachers, and school personnel out of harm's way.

Through these simple but logical changes, SB 959 provides needed clarity, guidance, and leadership to residents, schools, and local fire agencies on how to appropriately effectuate school closures in the event of potential fires in Oakland and our neighboring communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Janani Ramachandran

City of Oakland, District 4 Councilmember

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