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ACR-34 Sylvia Mendez Day. (2025-2026)

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Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 34

CHAPTER 64

Relative to Sylvia Mendez Day.

[Filed with Secretary of State May 20, 2025.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 34, Ta. Sylvia Mendez Day.

This measure would declare April 14 as Sylvia Mendez Day.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, The landmark United States Supreme Court case *Mendez v. Westminster School Dist. of Orange County* (S.D. Cal. 1946) 64 F.Supp. 544, affd. *Westminster School Dist. of Orange County v. Mendez* (9th Cir. 1947) 161 F.2d 774 (hereafter *Mendez v. Westminster*) was a pivotal decision in the struggle for civil rights and educational equality for Mexican American students in California; and

WHEREAS, The case arose from discriminatory practices occurring all over America where Mexican American children were segregated into "Mexican schools" under the guise of separate but equal policies; and

WHEREAS, The *Mendez v. Westminster* case challenged these policies, asserting that the segregation of Mexican American children violated their rights under the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which guarantees equal protection under the law; and

WHEREAS, The United States District Court's ruling in *Mendez v. Westminster* was one of the first major legal decisions to strike down segregation in schools in the United States, paving the way for future desegregation cases, including the landmark *Brown v. Board of Ed. of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kan.* (1954) 347 U.S. 483 (hereafter *Brown v. Board of Education*); and

WHEREAS, Earl Warren, who was Governor of California at the time of the *Mendez v. Westminster* case, supported the legal action and the bill that led to the end of school segregation in California, and later was appointed as Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, played a key role in the writing of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which extended the principles of *Mendez v. Westminster* nationwide; and

WHEREAS, Thurgood Marshall, an influential civil rights attorney and later an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, played a pivotal role in the national civil rights movement by writing a friend-of-the-court brief in support of the plaintiffs in *Mendez v. Westminster* case, using legal arguments that would later inform his work on *Brown v. Board of Education*, helping to shape the legal foundation for desegregating public schools across the United States; and

WHEREAS, California led the United States in banning school segregation, with the Mendez v. Westminster case setting a crucial precedent that resulted in the Legislature passing laws to eliminate school segregation in the state, well before the national legal landscape was transformed by Brown v. Board of Education; and

WHEREAS, Members of the Latino community in California, particularly Mexican American families, were among the first to challenge and fight against the segregation of public schools in the United States, laying the groundwork for the broader civil rights movement and the eventual nationwide struggle for equal access to education; and

WHEREAS, The case was brought forth by four Mexican American families from school districts in the communities of Westminster, Garden Grove, and El Modena, and the City of Santa Ana, with the support of civil rights organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and prominent figures such as Thurgood Marshall; and

WHEREAS, The Mendez v. Westminster decision had a profound impact not only on the educational system of California but also on the civil rights movement, as it marked an early victory in the ongoing fight against racial segregation and discrimination in the United States; and

WHEREAS, The legal precedent set by Mendez v. Westminster was a significant step toward the eventual dismantling of racial segregation across the nation and was instrumental in shaping the civil rights landscape of the 20th century; and

WHEREAS, It is important to honor and recognize the courage of the families and the contributions of the legal and civil rights advocates who fought for justice in this landmark case, which continues to inspire efforts toward equality and inclusion in education and society; and

WHEREAS, April 14 marks the 78th anniversary of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit decision in Mendez v. Westminster, and it is fitting to commemorate this day as a reminder of the ongoing fight for equal rights and the importance of education in fostering a just and equitable society: now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature declares April 14 as Sylvia Mendez Day, in recognition of the significance of the historic Mendez v. Westminster case in advancing civil rights and promoting educational equality for all students in California and the United States; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature encourages all Californians to reflect on the importance of the Mendez v. Westminster case, to honor the courage of the individuals who fought for justice, and to continue working toward a more inclusive and equitable society for future generations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the Governor, to the families of the plaintiffs in Mendez v. Westminster, to the State Department of Education, and to the author for appropriate distribution.