

Date of Hearing: April 22, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS, AND TOURISM

Christopher M. Ward, Chair

AB 644 (Gabriel) – As Amended March 28, 2025

SUBJECT: Holocaust memorial

SUMMARY: This bill would authorize a nonprofit organization that represents victims and survivors of the Holocaust to plan, construct, and maintain a memorial in consultation with the Natural Resources Agency.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the Natural Resources Agency to consult with a recognized nonprofit organization to do all of the following in the planning, construction, and maintenance of a memorial to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust:
 - a) Review the preliminary design plans to identify potential maintenance concerns.
 - b) Ensure compliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12101 et seq.) and other safety concerns.
 - c) Review and approve any documents prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (Division 13 (commencing with Section 21000) of the Public Resources Code).
 - d) Review final construction documents to ensure that the documents comply with all applicable laws.
 - e) Prepare the right-of-entry permit outlining the final area of work, final construction documents, construction plans, the contractor hired to perform the work, insurance, bonding, provisions for damage to state property, and inspection requirements.
 - f) Inspect all construction performed by the contractor selected by the nonprofit organization pursuant to this section.
 - g) Regularly maintain the memorial in accordance with the agency's general maintenance responsibilities.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Authorizes state agencies to partner with nonprofit organizations for historical resource preservation projects. (Public Resources Code Section 5079.40-5079.44)
- 2) Establishes an International Genocide Memorial Commission, with the intent to design and construct a memorial to California's genocide survivors in the Capital Park. The actual construction of the memorial may not proceed until the master plan of the State Capitol Park is approved and adopted. (Government Code Section (GOV) 6310-6313)

- 3) Prescribes various duties for Department of General Services (DGS) in connection with development and maintenance of the park around the State Capitol Building and state properties throughout the State of California. (GOV 14600-14706)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This measure has been keyed fiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

- 1) Author's statement. According to the author, "We are now living in a world where the last generation of Holocaust survivors are quickly passing away, and a generation of young American are deeply unfamiliar with the lessons of the genocide against our people. In this moment, Californians stand up for our community and our values as a state. The Holocaust is both millions of individual traumas, and also a lasting collective trauma for the Jewish people; we must unequivocally express our collective responsibility as a state to never forget, and commit to the promise: 'never again.'"
- 2) Background. Approximately 10,000 Holocaust survivors live in Southern California, out of approximately 12,000 survivors statewide. The Desert Holocaust Memorial is the closest memorial to Los Angeles and the only public monument in the region. A number of monuments have been established to honor other communities throughout Los Angeles, such as the Armenian Genocide Martyrs Memorial in Montebello, which was dedicated after the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide; the Bracero Monument, commissioned by the City of LA Cultural Department and dedicated in 2019; and the Los Angeles Holodomor-Genocide Monument dedicated after the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide in Ukraine, at Grand Park, commissioned by the Ukraine American Community of LA. To date, there is no official California State Holocaust Memorial.

This comes amid historic lows in Holocaust awareness and a lack of basic knowledge about the Holocaust among younger generations across the nation and globally. What's more, the lack of awareness is expected to grow, as fewer Holocaust survivors are alive with every year, to share the lessons and reality of this genocide. Particularly with upcoming international events being hosted in California, now is a critical moment to ensure the international community sees our state's commitment to remembering the truth of our challenging history and has committed to a permanent reminder of our collective responsibility.

- 3) Memorials. Nonprofit organizations in California often collaborate with the state's Natural Resources Agency to establish memorials that reflect cultural heritage, historical events, and environmental values. These partnerships are usually facilitated through grants or land-use agreements and must follow specific state regulations to ensure responsible stewardship of public resources. A prominent example is the development of the Joshua Tree Cultural Center in Twentynine Palms, built with \$2 million in state funds. The center serves as both a memorial and educational hub for the Chemehuevi and Serrano (San Manuel) Bands of Mission Indians, preserving and presenting artifacts and tribal history.
- 4) Prior and related legislation:
 - a) SB 537 (Becker), Chapter 859, Statutes of 2024, authorizes a nonprofit organization that represents Mexican Americans or Mexican immigrants to enter into negotiations with the DGS to plan, construct, and maintain a memorial to Mexican Americans and Mexican

immigrants who were forcibly deported from the United States during the Great Depression.

- b) AB 338 (Ramos), Chapter 280, Statutes of 2021 authorizes the construction and maintenance of a monument to the California Native people of the Sacramento region on the grounds of the State Capitol.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

No support on file.

Opposition

No opposition on file.

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