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State Government

Gov. Gavin Newsom Signs Bill Limiting California Vaccine Medical Exemptions, Despite Capitol Protests

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The Senate chamber is brought to a halt by protesters.

Andrew Nixon / Capital Public Radio

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Gov. Gavin Newsom has signed two bills that seek to prevent doctors from issuing fraudulent medical exemptions for vaccines. He did so after a flurry of final votes in the Legislature and amid a day of protest and arrests.

SB 276 by Sen. Richard Pan (D-Sacramento) would require the state health department to review exemption forms issued by doctors who grant more than five medical exemptions in a year, or in school districts with low immunization rates.

"I thank the Governor for standing with science, and once again making California a leader in safeguarding children and communities from diseases that threaten our public health," Pan said in a statement.

The governor's signature came after lawmakers in both chambers quickly passed a separate but related measure on Monday, Pan's SB 714, which made it through without the usual committee hearing given to bills that are broadly rewritten in the final days of the legislative session.

That measure carries a deal Pan and Newsom reached last week that would grandfather in all medical exemptions prior to January 1, when SB 276 takes effect. However, a student who previously received an exemption would need to obtain a new exemption before entering kindergarten or 7th grade, or when newly enrolling in a school district or school.

"This legislation provides new tools to better protect public health, and does so in a way that ensures parents, doctors, public health officials and school administrators all know the rules of the road moving forward," Newsom said in a statement provided by his office.

Demonstrators earlier sought to block entrances to the Capitol and repeatedly disrupted the Senate and Assembly — a tactic that frustrated lawmakers of both parties, even those who oppose this year's legislation.

As Sen. Connie Leyva (D-Chino) presided over the Senate debate, she asked the crowd in the gallery to "maintain some civility." After a protester called back, Leyva responded: "There is civility here, sir — on our part, not yours."

A moment later, Senate Republican Leader Shannon Grove (R-Bakersfield) asked for that protester to be ejected from the chamber.

Lawmakers who spoke during debate on SB 714 were largely in opposition, with supporters limiting their remarks to a formal presentation of the bill's summary.

"I think we all need to go back to the drawing board, sit down at the table and talk about solutions for our most vulnerable citizens," said Asm. Devon Mathis (R-Visalia).

In other activity at the Capitol:

- Newsom also signed a bill limiting suspensions for disruptive students. The law eliminates the suspensions for fourth and fifth graders and temporarily bans them for students in sixth-through-eighth grade. Supporters of the legislation say the suspensions disproportionately impact minority and LGBT students.
- An effort to create banking opportunities for cannabis businesses stalled. Sen. Bob Hertzberg authored the bill and says he will take it again up next year.
- Lawmakers approved a measure to expand the state's gun restraining order law. It currently allows police and family members to file a court petition to temporarily take away an individual's firearms if they are considered a danger to themselves or others. The proposal would also let educators, employers and co-workers file petitions.
- A measure that would allow college athletes to profit from their celebrity status passed with no opposition. The NCAA's policy is clear that athletes are not allowed to make money while playing sports. But California's "Fair Pay to Play Act" challenges that rule. It would allow student-athletes to make money from the use of their name and image.



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1 Comment

