

New California Laws 2026

SB 294: California's 'Workplace Know Your Rights Act' demands employer action

By Ryan Malhan

Senate Bill 294, also known as the Workplace Know Your Rights Act, is an important new employment law in California that aims to ensure that workers understand their rights and constitutional protections. Effective Jan. 1, 2026, the law introduces significant requirements for notice, training and recordkeeping. Employers will need to provide a stand-alone written notice of workers' rights to each new hire and distribute it annually to all current employees. Prompted in part by recent concerns over immigration enforcement and worksite detentions, the law's objective is to strengthen awareness of labor and civil rights, including protections during workplace interactions with law enforcement.

Four key elements of the law include:

Annual and new hire notices

To aid compliance, the Labor Commissioner will issue a model

notice by Jan. 1, 2026, with annual updates. The written notice will cover topics such as paid sick leave, protections against immigration-related retaliation and constitutional rights during law enforcement encounters at work. Notices must also be furnished to any union representing the workforce.

Language access and education

Acknowledging California's multilingual workforce, notices must be delivered in the language customarily used for employment communications. The Labor Commissioner will make templates available in at least nine languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog and Punjabi. By July 1, 2026, the agency will also release educational videos for employers and employees to reinforce awareness.

Emergency contact notifications

Employers must notify an employee's designated emergency contact if the employee is arrested or

detained at the worksite. For arrests occurring offsite during work hours, notice is required only if the employer has actual knowledge of the arrest. Employers must request and/or collect emergency contact details by March 30, 2026.

Compliance and penalties

Employers must maintain proof of notice delivery for three years. Noncompliance with the notification requirements may result in penalties of up to \$500 per employee per day, capped at \$10,000 per employee. Enforcement will be handled by the Labor Commissioner and public prosecutors, with anti-retaliation protections for employees exercising their rights or participating in investigations.

Implications for employers

Beyond revising onboarding and annual communication processes, businesses should prepare for multilingual communications, recordkeeping and emergency contact protocols. Employers should consider:

- Auditing current notice practices
 - Preparing the required written notice
 - Training HR teams on new requirements
 - Updating systems for three-year retention of delivery records
- Early preparation will help employers avoid potentially costly enforcement actions and maintain employee trust in an increasingly regulated environment.

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