

JAN 19 2024

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the department of
2 education provides regular bus service for qualified public
3 school students to facilitate compliance with the State's
4 compulsory attendance, as well as with federal law relating to
5 the provision of a free and appropriate education. According to
6 the department of education, there are approximately twelve
7 thousand student riders on Oahu and thirteen thousand on the
8 neighbor islands.

9 The legislature further finds that school bus service
10 provided by the department of education is essential for getting
11 students to and from school, particularly for students who lack
12 other transportation options or face hardship in obtaining
13 school transportation services due to economic difficulty. Yet,
14 chronic bus driver shortages have led to the cancellation or
15 consolidation of many school bus routes, reducing transportation
16 options for families. At the beginning of the 2023-2024 school
17 year, department officials reported that they were short by



1 roughly two hundred twenty-five drivers out of a total of nearly
2 six hundred fifty positions, or over one-third of the total
3 number of bus driver positions in existence statewide.

4 The legislature additionally finds that in July 2023, the
5 department cancelled or suspended school bus service for
6 fourteen schools statewide, which impacted nearly one thousand
7 four hundred students across Oahu and Kauai. Moreover, the bus
8 driver shortage has severely impacted Hawaii Island school
9 communities, where county bus services do not operate as
10 frequently as on Oahu and where many students face commutes that
11 can exceed one and a half hours each way.

12 The legislature also finds that a lack of adequate school
13 bus transportation options exacerbates chronic absenteeism.
14 Rates of chronic absenteeism are highest in rural, remote, and
15 socioeconomically disadvantaged school communities. In the
16 2021-2022 school year, more than a third of Hawaii students were
17 chronically absent from school, meaning they missed fifteen or
18 more days of class. That was a significant jump from the year
19 before, when only eighteen per cent of students were counted as
20 chronically absent. Numerous studies show that chronic



1 absenteeism significantly worsens student achievement and lowers
2 graduation rates.

3 The legislature acknowledges that Governor Josh Green
4 announced an emergency proclamation related to the school bus
5 shortage on August 17, 2023, which allows the department of
6 transportation to grant exemptions for the use of vehicles other
7 than school buses to transport students and allows commercial
8 driver's license holders with a "P" endorsement for driving
9 passenger vehicles to operate student transportation vehicles.
10 More needs to be done, however, to sustain critical bus service
11 programs for Hawaii's public school students.

12 The purpose of this Act is to appropriate funds to
13 strengthen student transportation services for Hawaii's public
14 schools.

15 SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general
16 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$10,000,000 or so
17 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2024-2025 to
18 strengthen student transportation services for Hawaii's public
19 school system by:

20 (1) Establishing differential pay increases for student
21 bus drivers;



- 1 (2) Purchasing alternative vehicles for schools to
- 2 transport students, including but not limited to motor
- 3 coaches, minibuses, and vans;
- 4 (3) Paying educational staff or eligible community members
- 5 to operate vehicles for student transportation;
- 6 (4) Reimbursing schools for the cost of providing
- 7 additional student transportation services; and
- 8 (5) Establishing other programs or initiatives that the
- 9 department of education deems effective in improving
- 10 student transportation services, especially in rural,
- 11 remote, and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.

12 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
13 education for the purposes of this Act.

14 SECTION 3. In accordance with section 9 of article VII of
15 the Hawaii State Constitution and sections 37-91 and 37-93,
16 Hawaii Revised Statutes, the legislature has determined that the
17 appropriations contained in H.B. No. , will cause the state
18 general fund expenditure ceiling for fiscal year 2024-2025 to be
19 exceeded by \$ or per cent. In addition, the
20 appropriation contained in this Act will cause the general fund
21 expenditure ceiling for fiscal year 2024-2025 to be further



1 exceeded by \$ or per cent. The combined total
2 amount of general fund appropriations contained in only these
3 two Acts will cause the state general fund expenditure ceiling
4 for fiscal year 2024-2025 to be exceeded by
5 \$ or per cent. The reasons for exceeding the
6 general fund expenditure ceiling are that:

- 7 (1) The appropriation made in this Act is necessary to
8 serve the public interest; and
9 (2) The appropriation made in this Act meets the needs
10 addressed by this Act.

11 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2024.

12

INTRODUCED BY:  _____

S.B. NO. 2330

Report Title:

DOE; Student Transportation; Public Schools; Appropriation;
Expenditure Ceiling

Description:

Appropriates funds to the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services for Hawaii's public school system.

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