
A BILL FOR AN ACT

MAKING AN EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES.

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

1 SECTION 1. This Act is recommended by the governor for
2 immediate passage in accordance with section 9 of article VII of
3 the Constitution of the State of Hawaii.

4 SECTION 2. The legislature finds that the department of
5 human services administers the supplemental nutrition assistance
6 program for eligible households that meet income and other
7 program requirements. The legislature further finds that during
8 the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic (COVID-19), the department
9 of human services requested and received approval from the
10 federal government to waive numerous requirements related to the
11 processing of supplemental nutrition assistance program
12 benefits. These waivers allowed the department to quickly
13 respond to an increased demand for benefits while maintaining a
14 safe working environment for staff and the public.

15 Following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United
16 States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service



1 required states to end waivers and resume normal benefits
2 processing requirements. From approximately October 2021
3 through September 2023, Hawaii and other states experienced
4 increased payment error rates in processing supplemental
5 nutrition assistance benefits. The increased error rates were
6 related to the changes in requirements during and following the
7 COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the high vacancy and turnover
8 rates for eligibility worker staff.

9 In June 2024, the United States Department of Agriculture
10 Food and Nutrition Service assessed the department of human
11 services a penalty of \$10,934,327 for having a supplemental
12 nutrition assistance program payment error rate above the
13 national average for two consecutive federal fiscal years.
14 However, in lieu of paying the total penalty, the United States
15 Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service provided
16 the option to the State to reinvest fifty per cent of the
17 penalty amount in program improvements that would reduce the
18 payment error rate.

19 The legislature further finds that the State is pursuing
20 the reinvestment option to resolve the penalty. The department
21 of human services plans to reinvest fifty per cent of the



1 assessed penalty to complete the development of a new
2 eligibility system, which is anticipated to be completed in late
3 2025. Notably, under the terms of the reinvestment option, if
4 the reinvestment results in the payment error rate falling under
5 and remaining below the national average, which is currently
6 11.68 per cent, the State will not be required to pay the
7 remaining fifty per cent of the penalty.

8 Failure to reinvest fifty per cent of the penalty amount
9 will result in the total penalty amount needing to be paid.
10 Additionally, failure to improve error rates may result in
11 increased financial penalties for the State.

12 Funding for this reinvestment option is required in fiscal
13 year 2024-2025 to make necessary modifications to the ongoing
14 development of the department of human services' new eligibility
15 system to specifically support automation of eligibility worker
16 tasks that will increase efficiency and reduce worker errors.
17 Reinvestment funding is also required this fiscal year to avoid
18 project delays and ensure that the new system includes the
19 technical capabilities required to reduce the payment error
20 rate.



1 The purpose of this Act is to make an emergency
2 appropriation of \$5,467,164 for fiscal year 2024-2025, which is
3 fifty per cent of the payment error penalty assessed by the
4 United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition
5 Service, to the department of human services to support the
6 necessary modifications to the ongoing development of a new
7 eligibility system.

8 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
9 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$5,467,164 or so much
10 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2024-2025 to be used
11 to reinvest in the ongoing development of a new eligibility
12 system that will result in reduced payment error rates.

13 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
14 human services for the purpose of this Act.

15 SECTION 4. In accordance with section 9 of article VII, of
16 the Constitution of the State of Hawaii and sections 37-91 and
17 37-93, Hawaii Revised Statutes, the legislature has determined
18 that the state general fund expenditure ceiling for fiscal year
19 2024-2025 has already been exceeded by \$8,551,796, or 1.0 per
20 cent. In addition, the appropriation contained in this Act will
21 cause the state general fund expenditure ceiling for fiscal year



1 2024-2025 to be further exceeded by \$5,467,164, or 1.0 per cent.
2 The reasons for exceeding the general fund expenditure ceiling
3 are that the appropriation made in this Act is necessary to
4 serve the public interest and to meet the needs addressed by
5 this Act.
6 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.



Report Title:

Department of Human Services; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Expenditure Ceiling; Emergency Appropriation

Description:

Provides an emergency appropriation for fifty per cent of the penalty assessed by the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service to be reinvested in the continued development of a new eligibility system that will assist in reducing the State's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program payment error rate, which, if successful, may result in the State not being required to pay the remaining fifty per cent of the penalty. Declares that the general fund expenditure ceiling is exceeded.

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