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## A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO WATER SAFETY.

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

1       SECTION 1. The legislature finds that drowning is the  
2       leading cause of death for children aged one to fifteen in the  
3       State and disproportionately affects individuals under the age  
4       of twenty-five. This preventable tragedy represents a  
5       significant public health concern and underscores the urgent  
6       need for action to address water safety in our island state.  
7       Hawaii's resident drowning rate is the second highest in the  
8       nation, highlighting a critical gap in water safety education  
9       and resources. Less than two per cent of Hawaii's second  
10      graders possess basic skills necessary to avoid or recover from  
11      drowning, further emphasizing the importance of implementing  
12      comprehensive water safety measures. Low-income students have  
13      even lower percentages, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific  
14      Islanders are disproportionately affected by drowning. This  
15      disparity underscores the necessity for equitable, culturally  
16      responsive interventions that address the specific needs of  
17      these communities. Also, teaching students how to safely access



1 wai and kai aligns with the department of education's Nā Hopena  
2 A'o (HĀ): "A department-wide framework to develop the skills,  
3 behaviors and dispositions that are reminiscent of Hawaii's  
4 unique context, and to honor the qualities and values of the  
5 indigenous language and culture of Hawaii."

6 The legislature further finds that evidence-based  
7 approaches demonstrate that drowning is preventable. Research  
8 shows that one month of formal swimming lessons can reduce the  
9 risk of drowning in children by eighty-eight per cent. The  
10 legislature recognizes the importance of investing in water  
11 safety education and ensuring equitable access to lifesaving  
12 resources in order to reduce health disparities and promote a  
13 culture of water safety. In an effort to increase water safety  
14 awareness across the State, the legislature enacted Act 24,  
15 Session Laws of Hawaii 2024, to designate May 15 of each year as  
16 Water Safety Day. Expanding access to swimming lessons and  
17 water safety education is a proven strategy to protect Hawaii's  
18 youth and reduce drowning incidents statewide.

19 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to require, and  
20 appropriate funds to, the department of education to establish a  
21 standards-based water safety education pilot program. This Act



1 aligns with the United States National Water Safety Action Plan,  
2 a ten-year roadmap designed to reduce drowning incidents through  
3 collective action. Additionally, it directly supports the 2025  
4 Hawaii Water Safety Plan's recommendations, which aim to enhance  
5 water safety and prevent drowning in our communities.

6 SECTION 2. (a) The department of education shall  
7 establish a standards-based water safety education pilot program  
8 at an elementary school that is within 1.5 miles of a swimming  
9 pool. The department of education shall partner with an  
10 existing community organization to facilitate the pilot program.

11 (b) The pilot program shall:

12 (1) Deliver water safety education during school hours;

13 (2) Utilize a curriculum aligned with state physical  
14 education and health education standards;

15 (3) Provide education that addresses each of the fifteen  
16 water safety competencies; and

17 (4) Have the following objectives:

18 (A) Development of student water safety knowledge;

19 (B) Development of safe behaviors and risk-management  
20 skills; and



1 (C) Development of aquatic motor skills and survival  
2 skills.

3 (c) The department of education shall submit a report of  
4 its findings and recommendations, including any proposed  
5 legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior  
6 to the convening of the regular session of 2026.

7 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general  
8 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so  
9 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and  
10 the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal  
11 year 2026-2027 for the department of education to establish the  
12 standards-based water safety education pilot program required  
13 under this Act.

14 The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department  
15 of education for the purposes of this Act.

16 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

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INTRODUCED BY:



JAN 22 2025



# H.B. NO. 1234

**Report Title:**

DOE; Standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program;  
Appropriation

**Description:**

Requires, and appropriates funds for, the Department of  
Education to establish a standards-based Water Safety Education  
Pilot Program.

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is  
not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

