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



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

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

20 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to require, and
21 appropriate funds to, the department of education to establish a



standards-based water safety education pilot program. This Act aligns with the United States National Water Safety Action Plan, a ten-year roadmap designed to reduce drowning incidents through collective action. Additionally, this Act directly supports the 2025 Hawaii Water Safety Plan's recommendations, which aim to enhance water safety and prevent drowning in our communities.

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

(b) The pilot program shall:

(1) Deliver water safety education during school hours;

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

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

(4) Have the following objectives:

(A) Development of student water safety knowledge;

(B) Development of safe behaviors and risk-management 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, 3000.



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. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

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not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

