
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO EDUCATION.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the BridgeUSA J-1
2 visa program, administered by the United States Department of
3 State, offers foreign teachers an opportunity to teach in
4 accredited schools in the United States servicing students in
5 grades kindergarten through twelve. The J-1 visa program was
6 also designed to help address the ongoing chronic teacher
7 shortage while providing academic and cultural exchange
8 opportunities to visiting teachers. Additionally, the J-1 visa
9 program offers the opportunity for foreign teachers of various
10 backgrounds to become a part of educational communities to
11 reflect the diverse student populations.

12 The legislature also finds that 22.4 per cent of the public
13 school student population identifies as Filipino, while only 7.4
14 per cent of educators share the same background. According to
15 the federal Institute of Education Sciences, diverse educator
16 representation significantly impacts student learning. Teachers
17 of color can often help close achievement gaps and improve



1 attendance and behavioral outcomes, and are highly rated by
2 students of all backgrounds.

3 Beyond academic benefits, having educators who reflect
4 their students' backgrounds can inspire future aspirations.
5 Seeing role models in the classroom can encourage students to
6 pursue similar career paths. Presently, the State's
7 implementation of the J-1 visa program has aimed to expose
8 Filipino children to Filipino educators, inspiring them to
9 consider careers in education. Conversely, the J-1 visa program
10 has further contributed to classroom diversity while eliminating
11 certain barriers to academic achievement.

12 Since its implementation, the J-1 visa program has been a
13 resounding success. To date, two hundred eighteen
14 internationally certified educators, primarily from the
15 Philippines, serve in fifty-five public schools statewide.
16 Similar to the Philippines, Kenya also has strong educational
17 equivalencies, and the State's first J-1 teacher from Kenya was
18 hired at an elementary school serving military families
19 accustomed to working with diverse educators around the globe.
20 Educators from the J-1 visa program are positively impacting the
21 State's diverse classrooms, and the program has strong support



1 from community organizations, including groups from the Filipino
2 community.

3 However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the
4 full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program.
5 Unlike states such as Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina, which
6 have streamlined licensing processes for international
7 educators, Hawaii classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires".
8 This designation requires prospective participants to take a
9 series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed
10 \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly
11 reduces the time available to analyze formative assessments,
12 meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers
13 are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators
14 in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

15 The legislature further finds that the State's existing
16 licensure reciprocity policies do not adequately recognize the
17 international qualifications of J-1 teachers. This limitation
18 contradicts the department of education's commitment to being
19 "globally competitive and locally committed". By creating a
20 more inclusive and equitable licensing system, the State can



1 fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of
2 international educators.

3 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to recognize the
4 qualifications and experience of international educators, while
5 ensuring equitable compensation, by requiring the Hawaii teacher
6 standards board to establish a provisional licensing pathway for
7 visiting international teachers.

8 SECTION 2. Section 302A-802, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
9 amended by amending subsection (c) to read as follows:

10 "(c) The board shall adopt policies, exempt from
11 chapters 91 and 92, to initiate the following:

12 (1) Develop criteria allowing more individuals with trade
13 or industry experience to teach in vocational,
14 technical, and career pathway programs, and criteria
15 for the issuance of permits allowing qualified
16 individuals to teach when recommended by the
17 superintendent or the commission, when appropriate.
18 The department or the commission, when appropriate,
19 shall be responsible for the review and acceptance of
20 the relevant licenses, certificates, or other
21 qualifications related to an individual's vocational,



1 technical, or career pathway education-related
2 experience that the department or the commission, when
3 appropriate, deems necessary for a permit. The
4 department or the commission, when appropriate, shall
5 have the authority to waive the requirement of a
6 bachelor's degree to teach in a vocation, technical,
7 or career pathway education program;

8 (2) Develop a plan to accept teachers from any state as
9 long as they have completed state-approved teacher
10 education programs and pass relevant Hawaii teacher
11 examinations or their equivalent;

12 (3) Clarify the requirements, on a state-by-state basis,
13 for out-of-state licensed teachers to obtain a license
14 in Hawaii;

15 (4) Develop a plan to facilitate licensing for those who
16 intend to teach in Hawaii immersion programs, the
17 island of Niihau, or any other extraordinary situation
18 as defined by the superintendent or the
19 superintendent's designee, or by the commission, when
20 appropriate;



1 (5) Pursue full teacher license reciprocity with all other
2 states; [~~and~~]

3 (6) Develop a plan to facilitate an optional certification
4 for those who teach or intend to teach at private
5 schools[~~-~~]; and

6 (7) Establish a visiting international teacher license,
7 and the requirements necessary to obtain the visiting
8 international teacher license, to promote cultural and
9 educational exchange between the State and other
10 countries."

11 SECTION 3. The Hawaii teacher standards board shall submit
12 a report to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to
13 the convening of the regular session of 2026 on how to support
14 international teachers teaching in the State through the J-1
15 visa program.

16 SECTION 4. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
17 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

18 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000.



Report Title:

Filipino Caucus; HTSB; International Teacher License; Criteria; Establishment; Report

Description:

Requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders and the requirements to obtain the international teacher license. Requires a report to the Legislature. Effective 7/1/3000.
(HD1)

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