

JAN 23 2025

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'ō (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.

17
INTRODUCED BY: _____



S.B. NO. 1223

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.

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