

JAN 17 2025

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER CERTIFICATION SUBSIDY PILOT
PROGRAM.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that there is currently a
2 nationwide school bus driver shortage. While the department of
3 education contracts school bus services to various contractors
4 on multiple islands, driver shortages have resulted in the
5 cancellation, temporary suspension, and consolidation of bus
6 routes. Among bus service contractors statewide, an estimated
7 one hundred seventy-nine additional drivers are needed to fully
8 staff school bus routes. Over the last school year, one hundred
9 seventy-five school bus drivers have vacated their positions.

10 The legislature also finds that the school bus driver
11 shortage negatively impacts student attendance and causes
12 difficulties for working parents who juggle jobs and school
13 drop-offs. In addition, the lack of affordable school bus
14 options has made it prohibitively expensive to organize school
15 field trips that enrich student learning.



1 The legislature further finds that the State's severe bus
2 driver shortage is felt disproportionately by families living in
3 rural, underserved areas. The department of education has been
4 forced to implement a series of unconventional programs to
5 provide basic transportation for keiki attending public schools
6 in rural, underserved areas. Some measures taken by the
7 department of education include providing for pay differentials
8 for school bus drivers in rural areas, purchasing free public
9 bus passes for public school students, and authorizing
10 principals or other administrative staff to drive students.

11 In response to the State's severe bus shortage, the
12 governor issued two emergency proclamations to address the
13 chronic bus driver shortage for the 2024-2025 school year, which
14 authorized the department of transportation to grant exemptions
15 for the use of vehicles other than school buses to transport
16 students and ensure transportation support for students
17 attending department of education and other independent schools.
18 Despite recent efforts to incentivize individuals to become
19 school bus drivers, more needs to be done to address this
20 critical shortage in the State.



1 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to establish a one-
2 year school bus driver certification subsidy pilot program
3 within the department of education to provide subsidized
4 training and education opportunities for prospective school bus
5 drivers.

6 SECTION 2. (a) The department of education shall
7 establish and administer a one-year school bus driver
8 certification subsidy pilot program to subsidize the costs
9 associated with the training and certification of prospective
10 bus drivers and address the ongoing chronic shortage of school
11 bus drivers in the State.

12 (b) The department of education shall establish:

13 (1) Eligibility criteria for prospective applicants to
14 participate in the bus driver certification subsidy
15 pilot program, including any qualifications and
16 disqualifications for entry into the pilot program in
17 accordance with federal and state regulations;

18 (2) A curriculum or training plan for prospective bus
19 drivers to obtain a commercial driver's license,
20 including courses to obtain additional endorsements
21 required to drive a school bus; and



(3) Pathways for existing school van drivers or school bus aides to obtain a commercial driver's license, additional endorsements required to drive a school bus, or training to operate school buses for special education students.

(c) The department of education shall submit an interim report on the development and administration of the school bus driver certification subsidy pilot program, including any proposed legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2026.

(d) The department of education shall submit a final report on the school bus driver certification subsidy pilot program, including any proposed legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2027.

(e) The school bus driver certification subsidy pilot program shall cease to exist at the end of the 2025-2026 school year.

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 for



1 the school bus driver certification subsidy pilot program
2 established pursuant to section 2 of this Act.

3 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
4 education for the purposes of this Act.

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

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INTRODUCED BY:

DKK



S.B. NO. 868

Report Title:

DOE; School Bus Driver Certification Subsidy Pilot Program;
Reports; Appropriation

Description:

Establishes a one-year School Bus Driver Certification Subsidy Pilot Program within the Department of Education for the 2025-2026 school year. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates fund.

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

