

---

# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that safe, reliable, and  
2 timely student transportation is a critical component of the  
3 State's public education system and is essential to ensuring  
4 equitable access to educational opportunities for students  
5 across the State.

6 The legislature further finds that the State continues to  
7 experience a severe and persistent shortage of qualified school  
8 bus drivers, resulting in delayed routes, service disruptions,  
9 and, in some cases, the elimination of bus service for students  
10 and families. These shortages disproportionately affect rural,  
11 remote, and hard-to-reach communities, particularly on the  
12 neighbor islands, where geographic isolation, long travel  
13 distances, limited labor pools, high costs of living, and  
14 competition with private-sector commercial driving opportunities  
15 create significant barriers to recruitment and retention.

16 The legislature additionally finds that the current pathway  
17 to becoming a school bus driver in the State requires the



1 completion of specific training, testing, and commercial driver  
2 licensing requirements, including access to certified  
3 instructors, testing sites, and credentialing services that are  
4 often concentrated on O‘ahu or in limited locations. The  
5 legislature recognizes that restricted access to these  
6 credentialing and licensing opportunities creates significant  
7 logistical and financial barriers for prospective drivers  
8 residing on the neighbor islands, where travel costs, time away  
9 from work or family, and limited scheduling availability  
10 discourage participation in the profession. Expanding access to  
11 training, testing, and credentialing opportunities on the  
12 neighbor islands is therefore essential to strengthening the  
13 school bus driver workforce and ensuring that rural and hard-to-  
14 reach areas can recruit and retain drivers from within their own  
15 communities.

16 The legislature recognizes that the absence of a  
17 comprehensive, statewide strategy to recruit, train, and retain  
18 school bus drivers has exacerbated inequities between urban and  
19 rural areas and has placed additional burdens on working  
20 families, kūpuna caregivers, and students who rely on school bus



1 services as their primary means of transportation to and from  
2 school.

3 The legislature also finds that targeted financial  
4 incentives, including recruitment grants and signing bonuses  
5 with repayment provisions, are necessary to attract new drivers,  
6 support training and licensing costs, and build a sustainable  
7 pipeline of school bus drivers who reflect and understand the  
8 communities they serve.

9 The purpose of this Act is to ensure safe, equitable, and  
10 reliable student transportation and address the school bus  
11 driver shortage, with particular attention to the unique  
12 challenges faced by rural and neighbor island school districts,  
13 by:

- 14 (1) Requiring the department of education to establish a  
15 school bus driver recruitment grant program;
- 16 (2) Establishing a school bus driver recruitment special  
17 fund;
- 18 (3) Establishing a repayment signing bonus program;
- 19 (4) Requiring a report to the legislature; and
- 20 (5) Appropriating funds.



1 SECTION 2. Chapter 302A, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
2 amended by adding two new sections to part II, subpart C to be  
3 appropriately designated and to read as follows:

4 **§302A-A School bus driver recruitment grant program.** (a)

5 There is established within the department a school bus driver  
6 recruitment grant program to help increase the State's  
7 recruitment and retention of school bus drivers.

8 (b) The program shall authorize grants to:

9 (1) Fund the requirements to obtain commercial learner's  
10 permits pursuant to section 286-238.2;

11 (2) Fund the requirements for the issuance of commercial  
12 driver's licenses pursuant to section 286-236;

13 (3) Provide for additional costs relating to commercial  
14 driver's licenses and commercial learner's permits,  
15 including but not limited to applications, testing,  
16 driver training, and medical fees;

17 (4) Fund commercial driver's license and school bus driver  
18 training courses, including but not limited to courses  
19 related to class A and class B commercial driver's  
20 licenses and school bus endorsements;



1       (5) Fund costs for community colleges and the university  
2        of Hawaii to conduct bus driver training courses; and  
3       (6) Fund mobile bus driver training units that may travel  
4        to neighbor islands, as appropriate.  
5       (c) Applications for grants shall be made to the  
6       department and contain the information as shall be required by  
7       rules adopted thereunder. At a minimum, the applicant shall:  
8       (1) Be a licensed driver;  
9       (2) Agree to use state funds exclusively for the purposes  
10       of this program;  
11       (3) Indicate capability to properly use the grant for the  
12       purpose of this program;  
13       (4) Comply with other requirements as the department may  
14       prescribe;  
15       (5) Comply with all applicable federal, state, and county  
16       statutes, rules, and ordinances;  
17       (6) Agree to indemnify and save harmless the State and its  
18       officers, agents, and employees from and against any  
19       and all claims arising out of or resulting from the  
20       use of grants for this program, and procure sufficient



1                   insurance to provide this indemnification if requested  
2                   to do so by the department; and  
3                   (7) Agree to make available to the department all records  
4                   the applicant may have relating to the grant, to allow  
5                   state agencies to monitor the applicant's compliance  
6                   with this section.

7                   **§302A-B School bus driver recruitment special fund.** (a)

8                   There is established the school bus driver recruitment special  
9                   fund to be administered by the department into which shall be  
10                   deposited:

11                   (1) Appropriations by the legislature;  
12                   (2) State and federal grants;  
13                   (3) Any moneys collected pursuant to part XIII of  
14                   chapter 286, except any fees collected pursuant to  
15                   section 286-245(g); and  
16                   (4) All interest earned or accrued on moneys deposited in  
17                   the special fund.

18                   (b) Moneys in the special fund shall be expended  
19                   exclusively for the purposes of administering the school bus  
20                   driver recruitment grant program pursuant to section 302A-A."



1 SECTION 3. (a) There is established a repayment signing  
2 bonus program to be administered by the department of education.

3 (b) The repayment signing bonus program shall authorize  
4 and disburse a one-time signing bonus of \$2,000 to an individual  
5 with a commercial driver's license at the time the individual is  
6 hired as a school bus driver with the department of education.

7 (c) Any school bus driver who leaves employment  
8 voluntarily or is terminated before completing thirty-six months  
9 of employment shall repay the full money amount that the school  
10 bus driver received from the repayment signing bonus program  
11 pursuant to subsection (b).

12 (d) All moneys collected from the repayment signing bonus  
13 program shall be deposited into the general fund.

14 (e) The department shall adopt rules under chapter 91,  
15 Hawaii Revised Statutes, to effectuate the purposes of this  
16 section.

17 SECTION 4. The department of education shall submit  
18 quarterly reports to the legislature on its findings, including  
19 but not limited to:

20 (1) The total school bus driver vacancies by county;



- 1 (2) School bus driver applications, school bus driver
- 2 position offers, and positions accepted by county;
- 3 (3) Number of trainees who obtained a commercial driver's
- 4 license and school bus endorsement under the school
- 5 bus driver recruitment grant program established
- 6 pursuant to this Act;
- 7 (4) The length of time between when an individual starts
- 8 the school bus driver recruitment grant program and
- 9 when they obtain a school bus driver position;
- 10 (5) The total school bus driver hires and separations;
- 11 (6) The number of canceled routes or restored routes
- 12 attributed to the school bus driver recruitment grant
- 13 program;
- 14 (7) School bus driver retention at six, twelve, and
- 15 twenty-four months;
- 16 (8) The cost for each participant of the school bus driver
- 17 recruitment grant program;
- 18 (9) The average school bus driver hourly wage;
- 19 (10) The amounts expended by the school bus driver
- 20 recruitment special fund and the school bus driver
- 21 recruitment grant program;



- 1 (11) An assessment of the school bus driver recruitment  
2 grant program; and
- 3 (12) Specific barriers encountered and any proposed  
4 legislation.

- 5 Each report shall be posted to the department of education's
- 6 website and be available for public review.

7 SECTION 5. 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 2026-2027 to be  
10 deposited into the school bus driver recruitment special fund.

11 SECTION 6. There is appropriated out of the school bus  
12 driver recruitment special fund the sum of \$ or so  
13 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to  
14 provide grants for the school bus driver recruitment grant  
15 program.

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

18 SECTION 7. There is appropriated out of the general  
19 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so  
20 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to  
21 provide signing bonuses for the repayment signing bonus program.



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

3        SECTION 8. In codifying the new sections added by section  
4        2 of this Act, the revisor of statutes shall substitute  
5        appropriate section numbers for the letters used in designating  
6        the new sections in this Act.

7        SECTION 9. New statutory material is underscored.

8        SECTION 10. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000.



**Report Title:**

DOE; School Bus Driver Recruitment Grant Program; School Bus Driver Recruitment Special Fund; Repayment Signing Bonus Program; Report; Appropriation

**Description:**

Requires the Department of Education to establish a School Bus Driver Recruitment Grant Program. Establishes a School Bus Driver Recruitment Special Fund. Establishes a Repayment Signing Bonus Program. Requires a report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

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

