
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that Hawaii's working
2 families face significant economic challenges, including the
3 rising cost of living, inflation, and limited affordable options
4 for basic needs. Access to nutritious meals is essential for
5 the overall well-being of Hawaii's people. Further, for
6 students, healthy meals are critical to academic success.
7 However, for some students, school meals may be their only
8 consistent source of food.

9 The legislature further finds that research shows students
10 experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress,
11 depression, and chronic disease. Additionally, studies have
12 found that free school meal programs lead to improved student
13 performance. When universal free school meals have been
14 implemented elsewhere, student test scores rose the equivalent
15 of six additional weeks of school, making the program one of the
16 most cost effective and sustainable academic interventions that
17 the State can establish.



1 The legislature additionally finds that Act 139, Session
2 Laws of Hawaii 2025, expands free school meal coverage to
3 students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch beginning
4 with the 2025-2026 school year and expands coverage to students
5 whose family income is not more than three hundred per cent of
6 the federal poverty level beginning with the 2026-2027 school
7 year. Despite these gains, however, thousands of students
8 across the islands are still going hungry because of a lack of
9 resources to ensure consistent food security for themselves and
10 their families.

11 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to expand free
12 school meal coverage to all public school students beginning in
13 the 2029-2030 school year.

14 SECTION 2. Section 302A-404, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
15 amended to read as follows:

16 **"S302A-404 School meals.** (a) School meals shall be made
17 available under the school meals program in every school where
18 the students are required to eat meals at school.

19 (b) Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, students who
20 qualify for reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch
21 Program shall receive free school meals.



1 (c) Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, free school
2 meals shall be provided to every student enrolled in a
3 department school whose family income is [not] no more than
4 three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level, regardless
5 of a student's eligibility for participation in the federal
6 school meals program.

7 (d) Beginning with the 2029-2030 school year, free school
8 meals shall be provided to every student enrolled in a
9 department school, regardless of a student's eligibility for
10 participation in a federal school meals program.

11 [+] (e) No student shall be denied a meal solely for
12 failure to pay.

13 [+] (f) The department may adopt rules or policies
14 governing the collection of funds for student meal accounts with
15 a negative fund balance; provided that no rule or policy shall
16 prohibit feeding a student or otherwise conflict with subsection
17 [+] (e).

18 [+] (g) It is the intent of this section not to
19 jeopardize the receipt of any federal aid and, only to the
20 extent necessary to effectuate this intent, the governor may
21 modify strict provisions of this section, but shall promptly



1 report any modification with the governor's reasons therefore to
2 the next succeeding session of the legislature for review."

3 SECTION 3. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
4 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

5 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

6

INTRODUCED BY:

Juishi LaChica
JAN 21 2026



H.B. NO. 1779

Report Title:

DOE; Public Education; School Meals; Free

Description:

Expands free school meal coverage, beginning with the 2029-2030 school year, to all Department of Education students regardless of whether the student participates in a federal school meals program.

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

