
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

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

SECTION 1. This Act shall be known and may be cited as the
"Hawaii Free School Bus Access for Low-income Students Act".

SECTION 2. The legislature finds that the department of
education provides regular bus service for qualified public
school students to facilitate compliance with the State's
compulsory attendance law and transportation of school children
law, as well as with federal law relating to the provision of a
free and appropriate education. The legislature further finds
that the school bus service provided by the department of
education is crucial for getting students to and from school,
particularly for students who do not have other transportation
options or face hardship in obtaining school transportation
services due to economic difficulty. Students from low-income
families may face additional transportation barriers that limit
consistent school attendance and access to educational
opportunities.



1 The legislature further finds that access to school bus
2 service is currently constrained by a reservation-based system
3 that operates on a first-come, first-served basis. This
4 approach may unintentionally disadvantage low-income families,
5 who may face challenges in monitoring and responding quickly to
6 application timelines, such as limited internet access, language
7 barriers, or inflexible work schedules. As a result, students
8 with the greatest transportation need may be less likely to
9 secure a seat on a school bus.

10 The legislature additionally finds that to qualify for
11 regular school bus service, students in grades kindergarten
12 through five must reside a mile or more, and students in grades
13 six through twelve must reside 1.5 miles or more, from the
14 school within their attendance area. The legislature further
15 finds that a student who qualifies for free lunch under the free
16 and reduced price lunch program is eligible for a free bus pass;
17 however, there is no reciprocal benefit under the free and
18 reduced price lunch program for that same student to receive a
19 free bus pass. Students and families of households who qualify
20 for the reduced price lunch would also benefit from receiving
21 free bus passes.



1 The legislature recognizes that students from low-income
2 households experience disproportionate transportation barriers
3 that may negatively affect consistent school attendance and
4 access to educational opportunities, and that proactive
5 eligibility, prioritization, and communication practices are
6 necessary to promote equitable access to school transportation
7 services.

8 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to provide
9 equitable access to education by requiring the department of
10 education to create a student bus fare rate system for the
11 department of education's school bus program that includes free
12 bus passes for students whose household qualifies the student
13 for free lunch or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced
14 price lunch program.

15 SECTION 3. Section 302A-406, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
16 amended to read as follows:

17 "**§302A-406 Transportation of school children.** (a) The
18 department may provide suitable transportation to and from
19 school and for educational field trips for all children in
20 grades kindergarten to twelve and in special education classes.

21 (b) The department shall adopt policies, procedures, and



1 programs [~~as it deems~~] necessary to provide suitable
2 transportation~~[-]~~; provided that policies, procedures, and
3 programs related to the department's school bus program that
4 provide bus transportation services to students to and from
5 school shall encompass a student bus fare rate system that
6 includes eligibility for a free bus pass for students who
7 qualify, based on the student's household eligibility, for free
8 lunch or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price
9 lunch program; provided further that the department's school bus
10 program shall give priority for any student who qualifies for
11 free lunch or reduced price lunch in receiving a free bus pass.

12 (c) The department shall update and align its student
13 transportation application forms, systems, and processes to
14 ensure that students whose households qualify for free lunch or
15 reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price lunch
16 program may be easily identified for eligibility for a free bus
17 pass pursuant to this section.

18 (d) The department shall, to the extent practicable and
19 consistent with state and federal privacy laws, provide for
20 automatic or streamlined qualification for a free bus pass for
21 students who are determined to be eligible for free lunch or



1 reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price lunch
2 program, without requiring duplicative documentation or separate
3 applications from families of students.

4 (e) The department shall incorporate information regarding
5 eligibility for free bus passes for students who qualify for
6 free lunch or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced
7 price lunch program into its communications with families of
8 students, including providing advance notice prior to the
9 opening of any application or reservation period for free bus
10 passes; provided that the communications shall be designed to
11 proactively inform families of eligibility, timelines, and
12 prioritization criteria to reduce barriers to access and
13 minimize the need for families to independently seek out or
14 interpret eligibility requirements.

15 (f) The department may establish reasonable cutoff
16 periods, timelines, or prioritization frameworks to manage
17 capacity constraints on providing free bus passes pursuant to
18 this section; provided that students who qualify for free lunch
19 or reduced price lunch shall be prioritized in the allocation of
20 available bus seats.



1 (g) The department shall submit an annual report to the
2 legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of
3 each regular session on the implementation of providing free bus
4 passes for students who qualify, based on the student's
5 household eligibility, for free lunch or reduced price lunch
6 under the free and reduced price lunch program. The report
7 shall include:

8 (1) The number of students who qualify for free lunch
9 under the free and reduced price lunch program and
10 received a free bus pass;

11 (2) The number of students who qualify for reduced price
12 lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program
13 and received a free bus pass;

14 (3) The amount of funds expended to provide free bus
15 passes to qualifying students;

16 (4) A description of the department's procedures for
17 identifying and prioritizing students who qualify for
18 free lunch or reduced price lunch under the free and
19 reduced price lunch program, including any automatic
20 or streamlined eligibility processes;



(5) A summary of the department's outreach and communications efforts to notify families of students of eligibility, timelines, and prioritization for free bus passes; and

(6) Any proposed legislation.

~~[(b)]~~ (h) The department shall adopt rules under chapter 91 governing the supervision and administration of the transportation of school children under this section."

SECTION 4. 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 2026-2027 for the department of education to provide free bus passes for students whose household qualifies the student for free lunch or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program.

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

SECTION 5. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 6. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.



H.B. NO. 1780

INTRODUCED BY:

Trish Le Chica

JAN 21 2026



H.B. NO. 1780

Report Title:

DOE; Student Transportation; School Bus Program; Fares; Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program; Report; Appropriation

Description:

Requires the Department of Education to establish a student bus fare rate system that includes free bus passes for students whose household qualifies the student for free lunch or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

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