

JAN 23 2026

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that quality learning
2 experiences during a child's earliest years improve long-term,
3 multi-general outcomes and contribute to a strong, skilled
4 workforce. High-quality early learning programs support the
5 growth and development of children, help working families to
6 secure and sustain employment and economic vitality, promote the
7 creation of jobs and workforce support, and generate substantial
8 revenue for the State.

9 The legislature notes that despite the growing demand for
10 well-trained early learning professionals, the field is
11 experiencing a shortage of qualified and well-compensated
12 workers. Therefore, the legislature recognizes that it is
13 necessary to support the recruitment, retention, and
14 professional development of early learning professionals as an
15 investment in a workforce that supports the State's youngest
16 children and working families, which will contribute to the
17 current and future prosperity of the State.



1 The legislature further finds that registered
2 apprenticeship programs are proven models that create skilled
3 workforces tailored to the specialized needs of their respective
4 industries while fostering economic growth. Registered
5 apprenticeship programs are high-quality, industry-driven career
6 pathways that combine on-the-job training with classroom
7 instruction to prepare workers for skilled careers. Registered
8 apprenticeship programs ensure businesses have access to well
9 trained and qualified employees while also ensuring that
10 employees are fairly compensated commensurate to the necessary
11 qualifications. Furthermore, apprenticeship programs offer an
12 accessible pathway to stable careers, assist in developing
13 technical skills, upskill the existing workforce, and encourage
14 a culture of lifelong learning and continuous professional
15 development.

16 The legislature also finds that the first federally
17 approved early learning apprenticeship program recently launched
18 to serve as a critical recruitment and retention pathway for
19 prospective early learning professionals and increase access to
20 early learning opportunities. However, the legislature
21 recognizes that due to the significant labor costs required of



1 the industry, many early learning program service providers have
2 difficulty maintaining the federal compensation requirement and
3 are therefore disincentivized from participating in early
4 learning apprenticeship programs.

5 The legislature declares that the establishment of an early
6 learning apprenticeship grant program is a matter of statewide
7 concern.

8 The purpose of this Act is to establish an early learning
9 apprenticeship grant program, to be administered by the
10 university of Hawaii, to assist publicly- or privately-run early
11 learning program service providers participating in state- and
12 federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

13 SECTION 2. Chapter 304A, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
14 amended by adding a new section to subpart M of part IV to be
15 appropriately designated and to read as follows:

16 **"§304A- Early learning apprenticeship grant program;**
17 **established.** (a) There is established an early learning
18 apprenticeship grant program to be administered by the
19 university to provide financial support for early learning
20 program service providers in the State to participate in early
21 learning apprenticeship programs.



1 (b) The university shall award grants to an early learning
2 program service provider licensed or registered to provide child
3 care in the State that participates in a state- or federally-
4 approved early learning apprenticeship program as an employer or
5 sponsor; provided that priority shall be given to an early
6 learning program service provider that:

7 (1) Is licensed or registered to provide care for infants
8 and toddlers; and

9 (2) Enrolls children under the age of three.

10 (c) The university shall determine the grant amount per
11 license; provided that the university shall consider the
12 following factors when determining the grant amount:

13 (1) The size of an early learning program service provider
14 participating in a state- or federally-approved early
15 learning apprenticeship program as an employer;

16 (2) The difference between the statutorily-required wage
17 rates or prevailing industry standard wage rates,
18 whichever is higher, and the early learning program
19 service provider's current wage rates; and

20 (3) Other factors, including but not limited to stipend
21 bonuses or wage supplements.



1 (d) The university shall award grants based on criteria
2 developed by the university in consultation with the executive
3 office on early learning.

4 (e) The grant program shall provide financial assistance
5 to eligible early learning program service providers to cover
6 the costs associated with their participation in a state- or
7 federally-approved early learning apprenticeship program,
8 including:

9 (1) Personnel expenses and wages;

10 (2) Training expenses;

11 (3) Mentorship stipends;

12 (4) Administrative costs; and

13 (5) Wage or salary increases, wage supplements, or other

14 compensation enhancements as needed to attract and

15 retain qualified employees within the state- or

16 federally-approved apprenticeship framework, including

17 apprentices and other early learning employees;

18 provided that the wages shall match statutorily-required wage

19 requirements or prevailing industry standards, whichever is

20 higher.



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1 (f) The university may collaborate with the counties to
2 administer the grant program.

3 (g) The university shall submit a report of its findings
4 and recommendations, including any proposed legislation
5 regarding the grant program, to the legislature no later than
6 twenty days prior to the convening of each regular session. The
7 report shall include at minimum:

8 (1) The number of early learning program service providers
9 receiving grants pursuant to the program;

10 (2) The number of apprentices hired by early learning
11 program service providers receiving grants under the
12 program;

13 (3) The total amount of funds awarded to early learning
14 program service providers pursuant to the program; and

15 (4) The purposes for which the early learning program
16 service providers used the awarded grants, including
17 documentation on wages paid or wage increases given to
18 qualified employees within the state- or federally-
19 approved apprenticeship framework, including
20 apprentices and other early learning employees.

21 (h) For the purposes of this section:



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1 "Early learning" has the same meaning as in section 302L-1.

2 "Early learning program" means a publicly- or privately-run
3 program within the State's early learning system governed
4 pursuant to chapter 302L. "Early learning program" includes
5 center-based programs, family child care programs, family-child
6 interaction learning programs, and home-based instruction
7 programs.

8 "Grant program" means the early learning apprenticeship
9 grant program."

10 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
11 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
12 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for
13 the university of Hawaii to implement and administer the early
14 learning apprenticeship grant program.

15 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the university of
16 Hawaii for the purposes of this Act.

17 SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.

18 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.



S.B. NO. 2666

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INTRODUCED BY:

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S.B. NO. 2666

Report Title:

UH; Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program; Childcare;
Early Learning Opportunities; Reports; Appropriation

Description:

Establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

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

