
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 districts can recruit and retain drivers from within their
15 own 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 school districts and has placed additional burdens on
20 working families, kūpuna caregivers, and students who rely on



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

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

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

15 (1) Requiring the department of education to establish a
16 school bus driver recruitment grant program;

17 (2) Establishing a school bus driver recruitment special
18 fund;

19 (3) Establishing a repayment signing bonus program;

20 (4) Establishing a school bus driver outreach and pathway
21 program;



(5) Requiring a report to the legislature; and

(6) Appropriating funds.

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

"§302A- School bus driver recruitment grant program.

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

(b) The program shall authorize grants to:

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

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

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

(4) Fund commercial driver's license and school bus driver training courses, including but not limited to courses



1 related to class A and class B commercial driver's
2 licenses and school bus endorsements;

3 (5) Fund costs for community colleges and the university
4 of Hawaii to conduct bus driver training courses; and

5 (6) Fund mobile bus driver training units that may travel
6 to neighbor islands, as appropriate.

7 **\$302A- 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."



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 disperse 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 to
15 effectuate the purposes of this section.

16 SECTION 4. (a) The department of education shall
17 establish and administer a three-year prospective school bus
18 driver outreach and pathway program to increase the recruitment
19 of school bus drivers and address the ongoing chronic shortage
20 of school bus drivers in the State.



(b) The department of education shall develop for the program:

- (1) Recruitment campaigns;
- (2) Informational sessions regarding school bus driver recruitment;
- (3) Partnerships with public schools and community organizations within the State; and
- (4) Workforce development programs, including but not limited to career and technical courses for potential school bus drivers.

(c) The department of education shall provide:

- (1) Stipends for courses related to commercial driver's licenses and school bus endorsements; and
- (2) Equitable opportunities for neighbor islands, including working with local community colleges in each county to develop specific credentialing services.

SECTION 5. The department of education shall submit quarterly reports to the legislature on its findings, including but not limited to:

- (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 or prospective
6 school bus driver outreach and pathway program;
- 7 (4) The length of time between when an individual starts
8 the school bus driver recruitment grant program or
9 prospective school bus driver outreach and pathway
10 program and when they obtain a school bus driver
11 position;
- 12 (5) The total school bus driver hires and separations;
- 13 (6) The number of canceled routes or restored routes
14 attributed to the school bus driver recruitment grant
15 program and prospective school bus driver outreach and
16 pathway program;
- 17 (7) School bus driver retention at six, twelve, and
18 twenty-four months;
- 19 (8) The cost for each participant of the school bus driver
20 recruitment grant program and prospective school bus
21 driver outreach and pathway program;



(9) The average school bus driver hourly wage;

(10) The amounts expended by the school bus driver recruitment special fund and the school bus driver recruitment grant program;

(11) An assessment of the school bus driver recruitment grant program; and

(12) Specific barriers encountered and recommended statutory amendments.

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

SECTION 6. 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 to be deposited into the school bus driver recruitment special fund.

SECTION 7. There is appropriated out of the school bus driver recruitment special fund the sum of \$ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to provide grants for the school bus driver recruitment grant program.

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



1 SECTION 8. There is appropriated out of the general
2 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
3 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to
4 provide signing bonuses for the repayment signing bonus program.

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

7 SECTION 9. 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 for
10 the school bus driver outreach and pathway program.

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

13 SECTION 10. New statutory material is underscored.

14 SECTION 11. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

15
INTRODUCED BY:


JAN 21 2026



H.B. NO. 1770

Report Title:

DOE; School Bus Driver Recruitment Grant Program; School Bus Driver Recruitment Special Fund; Repayment Signing Bonus Program; School Bus Driver Outreach and Pathway 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. Establishes a School Bus Driver Outreach and Pathway Program. Requires a report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

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