
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

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

1 SECTION 1. This Act shall be known and may be cited as the
2 "Hawaii Free School Bus Access for Low-income Students Act".
3 SECTION 2. The legislature finds that the department of
4 education provides regular bus service for qualified public
5 school students to facilitate compliance with the State's
6 compulsory attendance law and transportation of school children
7 law, as well as with federal law relating to the provision of a
8 free and appropriate education. The legislature further finds
9 that the school bus service provided by the department of
10 education is crucial for getting students to and from school,
11 particularly for students who do not have other transportation
12 options or face hardship in obtaining school transportation
13 services due to economic difficulty. Students from low-income
14 families may face additional transportation barriers that limit
15 consistent school attendance and access to educational
16 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, students and families of households who qualify for the
18 reduced price lunch would also benefit from receiving free bus
19 passes.

20 The legislature recognizes that students from low-income
21 households experience disproportionate transportation barriers



1 that may negatively affect consistent school attendance and
2 access to educational opportunities, and that proactive
3 eligibility, prioritization, and communication practices are
4 necessary to promote equitable access to school transportation
5 services.

6 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to provide
7 equitable access to education by requiring the department of
8 education to create a student bus fare rate system for the
9 department of education's school bus program that includes free
10 bus passes for students who meet certain statutory requirements.

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

13 "**§302A-406 Transportation of school children.** (a) The
14 department may provide suitable transportation to and from
15 school and for educational field trips for all children in
16 grades kindergarten to twelve and in special education classes.

17 (b) The department shall adopt policies, procedures, and
18 programs [~~as it deems~~] necessary to provide suitable
19 transportation[-]; provided that policies, procedures, and
20 programs related to the department's school bus program that
21 provide bus transportation services to students to and from



1 school shall encompass a student bus fare rate system that
2 includes eligibility for a free bus pass for students who are
3 covered by section 302A-404; provided further that the
4 department's school bus program shall give priority for any
5 student who is covered by section 302A-404 in receiving a free
6 bus pass.

7 (c) The department shall update and align its student
8 transportation application forms, systems, and processes to
9 ensure that students who are covered by section 302A-404 may be
10 easily identified for eligibility for a free bus pass pursuant
11 to this section.

12 (d) The department shall, to the extent practicable and
13 consistent with state and federal privacy laws, provide for
14 streamlined qualification for a free bus pass for students who
15 are determined to be covered by section 302A-404, including
16 through parental consent for data sharing, without requiring
17 duplicative documentation or separate applications from families
18 of students.

19 (e) The department shall incorporate information regarding
20 eligibility for free bus passes for students who are covered by
21 section 302A-404 into its communications with families of



1 students, including providing advance notice prior to the
2 opening of any application or reservation period for free bus
3 passes; provided that the communications shall be designed to
4 proactively inform families of eligibility, timelines, and
5 prioritization criteria to reduce barriers to access and
6 minimize the need for families to independently seek out or
7 interpret eligibility requirements.

8 (f) The department may establish reasonable cutoff
9 periods, timelines, or prioritization frameworks to manage
10 capacity constraints on providing free bus passes pursuant to
11 this section; provided that students who are covered by section
12 302A-404 shall be prioritized in the allocation of available bus
13 seats.

14 (g) The department shall submit an annual report to the
15 legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of
16 each regular session on the implementation of providing free bus
17 passes for students who are covered by section 302A-404. The
18 report shall include:

19 (1) The number of students who are covered by section
20 302A-404 and received a free bus pass;



- 1 (2) The amount of funds expended to provide free bus
- 2 passes to qualifying students;
- 3 (3) A description of the department's procedures for
- 4 identifying and prioritizing students who are covered
- 5 by section 302A-404, including any streamlined
- 6 eligibility processes;
- 7 (4) A summary of the department's outreach and
- 8 communications efforts to notify families of students
- 9 of eligibility, timelines, and prioritization for free
- 10 bus passes; and
- 11 (5) Any proposed legislation.

12 [~~(b)~~] (h) The department shall adopt rules under chapter
 13 91 governing the supervision and administration of the
 14 transportation of school children under this section."

15 SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general
 16 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
 17 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for
 18 the department of education to provide free bus passes for
 19 students who receive a free meal pursuant to section 302A-404,
 20 Hawaii Revised Statutes.



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

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

5 SECTION 6. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000.



Report Title:

DOE; Student Transportation; School Bus Program; Fares; Report; Appropriation

Description:

Requires the Department of Education to establish a student bus fare rate system that includes free bus passes for students who meet certain statutory requirements. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

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