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# 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 school  
17 bus pass; however, students and families of households who  
18 qualify for the reduced price lunch would also benefit from  
19 receiving free school bus 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 school bus passes for students who meet certain statutory  
11 requirements.

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

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

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



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

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

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

20 (e) The department shall incorporate information regarding  
21 eligibility for free school bus passes for students who are



1 covered by section 302A-404 into its communications with  
2 families of students, including providing advance notice prior  
3 to the opening of any application or reservation period for free  
4 school bus passes; provided that the communications shall be  
5 designed to proactively inform families of eligibility,  
6 timelines, and prioritization criteria to reduce barriers to  
7 access and minimize the need for families to independently seek  
8 out or interpret eligibility requirements.

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

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

20 (1) The number of students who are covered by section  
21 302A-404 and received a free school bus pass;



- 1        (2) The amount of funds expended to provide free school
- 2        bus 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       school 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 school bus passes  
 19 for students who receive a free meal pursuant to section 302A-  
 20 404, 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 31, 2055.



H.B. NO. 1780  
H.D. 1  
S.D. 1

**Report Title:**

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

**Description:**

Requires the Department of Education to establish a student bus fare rate system that includes free school bus passes for students who meet certain statutory requirements. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/31/2055. (SD1)

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

