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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO EDUCATION.

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

1           SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the BridgeUSA J-1  
2 visa program, administered by the United States Department of  
3 State, offers foreign teachers an opportunity to teach in  
4 accredited schools in the United States serving students in  
5 grades kindergarten through twelve. The J-1 visa program was  
6 also designed to help address the ongoing chronic teacher  
7 shortage while providing academic and cultural exchange  
8 opportunities to visiting teachers. Furthermore, the J-1 visa  
9 program offers the opportunity for foreign teachers of various  
10 backgrounds to become a part of educational communities to  
11 reflect the diversity of student populations across the nation.

12           The legislature further finds that although 22.4 per cent  
13 of the public school student population in Hawaii identifies as  
14 Filipino, only 7.4 per cent of educators share the same ethnic  
15 background. According to the federal Institute of Education  
16 Sciences, diverse educator representation has a significantly  
17 positive effect on student learning. Teachers of color can



1 often help close achievement gaps and improve attendance and  
2 behavioral outcomes and are highly rated by students of all  
3 backgrounds. Beyond academic benefits, having educators who  
4 reflect their students' backgrounds can inspire future goals.  
5 Seeing role models in the classroom can encourage students to  
6 pursue similar career paths. Presently, the State's  
7 implementation of the J-1 visa program has aimed to expose  
8 Filipino children to Filipino educators, inspiring them to  
9 consider careers in education. Moreover, the J-1 visa program  
10 has contributed to classroom diversity while eliminating certain  
11 barriers to academic achievement.

12 Since its implementation, the J-1 visa program has been a  
13 resounding success. To date, three hundred sixty-five  
14 internationally certified educators, primarily from the  
15 Philippines, serve in one hundred and one public schools  
16 statewide. Similar to the Philippines, Kenya also has strong  
17 educational equivalencies, and the State currently employs four  
18 educators from Kenya with twenty-five additional educators from  
19 Africa set to arrive in the 2026-2027 school year. Educators  
20 from the J-1 visa program are beneficially affecting the State's  
21 diverse classrooms, and the program has strong support from



1 community organizations, including groups from the Filipino  
2 community.

3       However, the State's existing licensing rules limit the  
4 full potential of prospective international teachers  
5 participating in the J-1 visa program. Because the State does  
6 not recognize foreign teaching licenses for reciprocity,  
7 visiting international teachers are required to complete a  
8 series of additional examinations that often cost more than  
9 \$1,000 and demand extensive preparation time. These  
10 requirements place a disproportionate burden on educators who  
11 are already adapting to a new cultural and professional  
12 environment.

13       As a result, many teachers in the J-1 visa program are  
14 unable to complete the State's full licensure requirements  
15 within the three-year duration of their visa program. This  
16 inability prevents them from remaining for the optional two-year  
17 extension permitted under federal rules -- an extension that  
18 many other states use by offering streamlined visiting-  
19 international-teacher permits for the full duration of the  
20 teachers' visas. States such as Florida, Indiana, Ohio, and



1 Texas have implemented specialized permits that allow teachers  
2 to serve for the full five years of their exchange program.

3 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to require the  
4 Hawaii teacher standards board to develop an alternative pathway  
5 for a visiting international educator permit aligned to the  
6 duration of the educator's J-1 visa program. By doing so, the  
7 State would create a more equitable and culturally responsive  
8 public educational system, strengthening teacher retention,  
9 increasing instructional continuity for students, and ensuring  
10 that Hawaii benefits from the full five years of service that  
11 these highly qualified teachers are eligible to provide.

12 SECTION 2. Section 302A-802, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
13 amended by amending subsection (c) to read as follows:

14 "(c) The board shall adopt policies, exempt from chapters  
15 91 and 92, to initiate the following:

16 (1) Develop criteria allowing more individuals with trade  
17 or industry experience to teach in vocational,  
18 technical, and career pathway programs, and criteria  
19 for the issuance of permits allowing qualified  
20 individuals to teach when recommended by the  
21 superintendent or the commission, when appropriate.



1           The department or the commission, when appropriate,  
2           shall be responsible for the review and acceptance of  
3           the relevant licenses, certificates, or other  
4           qualifications related to an individual's vocational,  
5           technical, or career pathway education-related  
6           experience that the department or the commission, when  
7           appropriate, deems necessary for a permit. The  
8           department or the commission, when appropriate, shall  
9           have the authority to waive the requirement of a  
10          bachelor's degree to teach in a vocation, technical,  
11          or career pathway education program;

12          (2) Develop a plan to accept teachers from any state as  
13          long as they have completed state-approved teacher  
14          education programs and pass relevant Hawaii teacher  
15          examinations or their equivalent;

16          (3) Clarify the requirements, on a state-by-state basis,  
17          for out-of-state licensed teachers to obtain a license  
18          in Hawaii;

19          (4) Develop a plan to facilitate licensing for those who  
20          intend to teach in Hawaii immersion programs, the  
21          island of Niihau, or any other extraordinary situation



1 as defined by the superintendent or the  
2 superintendent's designee, or by the commission, when  
3 appropriate;

4 (5) Pursue full teacher license reciprocity with all other  
5 states; [~~and~~]

6 (6) Develop a plan to facilitate an optional certification  
7 for those who teach or intend to teach at private  
8 schools[~~-~~]; and

9 (7) Develop an alternative pathway for a visiting  
10 international educator permit to promote cultural  
11 exchange between the State and foreign nations;  
12 provided that the permit shall authorize a visiting  
13 international educator who agrees to come to the  
14 United States temporarily as a full-time teacher of  
15 record in an accredited primary or secondary school to  
16 teach all subjects and grade levels for which the  
17 educator is qualified and is employed by the  
18 department; provided further that a visiting  
19 international educator permit developed by the  
20 department shall remain valid for the duration

1           necessary to complete the educator's participation in  
2           a visiting international educator exchange program."

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

5           SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000, and  
6 shall be repealed on June 30, 2031; provided that section 302A-  
7 802, Hawaii Revised Statutes, shall be reenacted in the form in  
8 which it read on the day prior to the effective date of this  
9 Act.



**Report Title:**

J-1 Visa Program; Hawaii Teacher Standards Board; Visiting International Educator Permit

**Description:**

Requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to develop an alternative pathway for a visiting international educator permit aligned to the duration of the educator's J-1 visa program. Repeals 6/30/2031. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

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