

ACT 139

S.B. NO. 1300

A Bill for an Act Relating to School Meals.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that Hawaii's working families face significant economic challenges, including the rising cost of living, inflation, and limited affordable options for basic needs. Access to nutritious meals is essential for the overall well-being of Hawaii's people. Further, for students, access to healthy meals is critical to academic success and achievement. However, for some students, school meals may be their only consistent source of food.

The legislature also finds that Aloha United Way released the asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) report in January 2025, which identified that, while twelve per cent of households in the State are below the

poverty line, twenty-nine per cent are identified as ALICE households. ALICE households are defined as households with incomes above the federal poverty level but continue to struggle with the bare-minimum costs of basic necessities such as housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, and a smartphone plan, plus taxes. The report also found that forty-six per cent of ALICE households experience consistent food insecurity.

The legislature further finds that subsidizing the meal costs for students whose family income is not more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level will have the benefit of providing support to families in need. Additionally, subsidized meal costs for these students will allow students to focus on their academic careers, extracurricular activities, and life goals. Meal subsidies at department of education schools will allow more students to achieve a high-quality education while ensuring adequate nutrition for physical development and mental well-being.

Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to:

- (1) Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, expand free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch;
- (2) Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, expand free school meal coverage to students whose family income is not more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level; and
- (3) Appropriate funds to the department of education to subsidize meal costs for students eligible for reduced priced-meals and whose family income is not more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.

SECTION 2. Section 302A-404, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended to read as follows:

“§302A-404 School meals. (a) School meals shall be made available under the school meals program in every school where the students are required to eat meals at school.

(b) Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, students who qualify for reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program shall receive free school meals.

(c) Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, free school meals shall be provided to every student enrolled in a department school whose family income is not more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level, regardless of a student's eligibility for participation in the federal school meals program.

~~[(b)]~~ (d) No student shall be denied a meal solely for failure to pay[:

- ~~(1) Within the first twenty-one days of the first semester of a school year while the student's application for free or reduced lunch is being processed; or~~
- ~~(2) Within seven days after a student's meal fund account reaches a zero or negative balance].~~

~~[(e)]~~ (e) The department may adopt rules or policies governing the collection of funds for student meal accounts with a negative fund balance; provided that no rule or policy shall prohibit feeding a student [as required pursuant to subsection (b);] or otherwise conflict with subsection (d).

(f) It is the intent of this section not to jeopardize the receipt of any federal aid and, only to the extent necessary to effectuate this intent, the governor may modify strict provisions of this section, but shall promptly report any modification with the governor's reasons therefore to the next succeeding session of the legislature for review.”

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$565,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for meal subsidies for students eligible for reduced-price meals.

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

SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$2,800,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for meal subsidies for students at department of education schools whose family income is not more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.

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

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

SECTION 6. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

(Approved May 30, 2025.)