
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

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

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

9 The legislature also finds that Aloha United Way released
10 the asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) report
11 in January 2025, which identified that, while twelve per cent of
12 households in the State are below the poverty line, twenty-nine
13 per cent are identified as ALICE households. ALICE households
14 are defined as households with incomes above the federal poverty
15 level but continue to struggle with the bare-minimum costs of
16 basic necessities such as housing, childcare, food,
17 transportation, health care, and a smartphone plan, plus taxes.



1 The report also found that forty-six per cent of ALICE
2 households experience consistent food insecurity.

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

13 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to:

- 14 (1) Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, expand free
15 school meal coverage to students who currently qualify
16 for reduced-price lunch;
- 17 (2) Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, expand free
18 school meal coverage to students whose family income
19 is not more than three hundred per cent of the federal
20 poverty level; and



1 (3) Appropriate funds to the department of education to
2 subsidize meal costs for students eligible for reduced
3 priced-meals and whose family income is not more than
4 three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.

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

7 "**§302A-404 School meals.** (a) School meals shall be made
8 available under the school meals program in every school where
9 the students are required to eat meals at school.

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

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

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



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

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

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

17 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
18 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$565,000 or so much
19 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the
20 same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year



1 2026-2027 for meal subsidies for students eligible for reduced-
2 price meals.

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

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

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

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

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



Report Title:

Department of Education; Meal Subsidies; Appropriations

Description:

Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, expands free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch. Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, expands free school meal coverage to students whose family income is not more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level. Appropriates funds. (CD1)

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