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# HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE, TO ESTABLISH A STATEWIDE PEER COUNSELOR PROGRAM TO ADDRESS YOUTH LONELINESS AND SOCIAL DISCONNECTION IN HAWAII'S SCHOOLS.

1           WHEREAS, Hawaii's youth are experiencing increasing levels  
2 of loneliness, social isolation, and disconnection, all  
3 intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in  
4 prolonged disruptions to in-person schooling and a growing  
5 reliance on digital communication platforms; and  
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7           WHEREAS, national and state research demonstrates that  
8 loneliness is a significant risk factor for anxiety, depression,  
9 substance abuse, and suicidal ideation among adolescents and  
10 young adults; and  
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12           WHEREAS, within the State, youth mental health indicators  
13 have worsened in recent years, with rising anxiety, depression,  
14 and unmet emotional support needs among public school students,  
15 particularly among Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander youth;  
16 and  
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18           WHEREAS, studies have emphasized that the well-being of  
19 Native Hawaiians and other local communities is deeply  
20 relational and grounded in connection to peers, community, and  
21 place, and that disconnection from these relationships can  
22 negatively impact health and resilience; and  
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24           WHEREAS, the State Office of Wellness and Resilience was  
25 established pursuant to Act 291, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022, to  
26 advance trauma-informed and healing-centered approaches across  
27 state systems through coordination, prevention, and  
28 community-based strategies; and



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2 WHEREAS, students are often more likely to seek help or  
3 support from trusted peers than from adults, particularly when  
4 experiencing loneliness, stress, or early signs of emotional  
5 distress; and  
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7 WHEREAS, peer counselor and peer-support models have been  
8 proven to reduce stigma, strengthen belonging, promote early  
9 intervention, and improve school climate when implemented with  
10 appropriate training, supervision, and referral protocols; and  
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12 WHEREAS, Hawaii's unified statewide public education system  
13 and complex area structure provide a unique opportunity to  
14 implement peer-led programs that are locally responsive while  
15 maintaining centralized responsibility and consistency across  
16 the State; now, therefore,  
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18 BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives of the  
19 Thirty-third Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session  
20 of 2026, the Senate concurring, that the Department of  
21 Education, in collaboration with the Department of Health and  
22 Office of Wellness and Resilience, is urged to develop and  
23 implement a statewide peer counselor program for high school  
24 students; and  
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26 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of Education is  
27 urged to design the peer counselor program to address youth  
28 loneliness and social disconnection by prioritizing face-to-face  
29 peer relationships, trust building exercises, and culturally  
30 responsive approaches to improving and maintaining well-being;  
31 and  
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33 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, as part of the program, the  
34 Department of Education is urged to provide standardized  
35 training for participating student peer counselors, including  
36 training in active listening, ethical boundaries, trauma-  
37 informed and healing-centered practices, cultural  
38 responsiveness, and clear referral pathways to licensed mental  
39 health professionals; and  
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41 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that student peer counselors are  
42 urged to serve as trained points of connection within their



1 school communities, promoting belonging, normalizing  
2 conversations about well-being, and supporting the early  
3 identification of students experiencing isolation or distress;  
4 and

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Office of Wellness and Resilience is urged to support coordination among state agencies, provide guidance aligned with trauma-informed and healing-centered principles, and elevate youth voices and lived experiences in the design and evaluation of the program; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawaii State Youth Commission is urged to participate in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the statewide peer counselor program, including representing youth interests, gathering student input from across the State, and advising the Department of Education on the program's effectiveness, equity, and cultural responsiveness; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of Education is requested to implement the statewide peer counselor program for high school students in phases, beginning with pilot peer counselor programs in select schools determined by the Department, and to be conducted in an extended timeline to allow for adaptation, evaluation, and alignment with ongoing efforts; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Chairperson of the Board of Education, Superintendent of Education, Director of Health, Director of Human Services, Director of the Office of Wellness and Resilience, and Chairperson of the Hawaii State Youth Commission.

