
HOUSE 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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1 WHEREAS, students are often more likely to seek help or
2 support from trusted peers than from adults, particularly when
3 experiencing loneliness, stress, or early signs of emotional
4 distress; and

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6 WHEREAS, peer counselor and peer-support models have been
7 proven to reduce stigma, strengthen belonging, promote early
8 intervention, and improve school climate when implemented with
9 appropriate training, supervision, and referral protocols; and

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11 WHEREAS, Hawaii's unified statewide public education system
12 and complex area structure provide a unique opportunity to
13 implement peer-led programs that are locally responsive while
14 maintaining centralized responsibility and consistency across
15 the State; now, therefore,

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17 BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives of the
18 Thirty-third Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session
19 of 2026, that the Department of Education, in collaboration with
20 the Department of Health and Office of Wellness and Resilience,
21 is urged to develop and implement a statewide peer counselor
22 program for high school students; and

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24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of Education is
25 urged to design the peer counselor program to address youth
26 loneliness and social disconnection by prioritizing face-to-face
27 peer relationships, trust building exercises, and culturally
28 responsive approaches to improving and maintaining well-being;
29 and

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31 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, as part of the program, the
32 Department of Education is urged to provide standardized
33 training for participating student peer counselors, including
34 training in active listening, ethical boundaries, trauma-
35 informed and healing-centered practices, cultural
36 responsiveness, and clear referral pathways to licensed mental
37 health professionals; and

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39 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that student peer counselors are
40 urged to serve as trained points of connection within their
41 school communities, promoting belonging, normalizing
42 conversations about well-being, and supporting the early



1 identification of students experiencing isolation or distress;
2 and
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4 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Office of Wellness and
5 Resilience is urged to support coordination among state
6 agencies, provide guidance aligned with trauma-informed and
7 healing-centered principles, and elevate youth voices and lived
8 experiences in the design and evaluation of the program; and
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10 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawaii State Youth
11 Commission is urged to participate in the development,
12 implementation, and evaluation of the statewide peer counselor
13 program, including representing youth interests, gathering
14 student input from across the State, and advising the Department
15 of Education on the program's effectiveness, equity, and
16 cultural responsiveness; and
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18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of Education is
19 requested to implement the statewide peer counselor program for
20 high school students in phases, beginning with pilot peer
21 counselor programs in select schools determined by the
22 Department, and to be conducted in an extended timeline to allow
23 for adaptation, evaluation, and alignment with ongoing efforts;
24 and
25

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

