

MAR 10 2026

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 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 prolonged
4 disruptions to in-person schooling and a growing reliance on
5 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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30 WHEREAS, students are often more likely to seek help or
31 support from trusted peers than from adults, particularly when



1 experiencing loneliness, stress, or early signs of emotional
2 distress; and

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

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

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

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

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

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



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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 certified copies of this
19 Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Governor, Lieutenant
20 Governor, Chairperson of the Board of Education, Superintendent
21 of Education, Director of Health, Director of Human Services,
22 Director of the Office of Wellness and Resilience, and
23 Chairperson of the Hawaii State Youth Commission.
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OFFERED BY: M. A. Allen (B/R)

