

MAR 10 2026

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



1 agencies, provide guidance aligned with trauma-informed and
2 healing-centered principles, and elevate youth voices and lived
3 experiences in the design and evaluation of the program; and
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5 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawaii State Youth
6 Commission is urged to participate in the development,
7 implementation, and evaluation of the statewide peer counselor
8 program, including representing youth interests, gathering
9 student input from across the State, and advising the Department
10 of Education on the program's effectiveness, equity, and
11 cultural responsiveness; and
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13 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this
14 Resolution be transmitted to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor,
15 Chairperson of the Board of Education, Superintendent of
16 Education, Director of Health, Director of Human Services,
17 Director of the Office of Wellness and Resilience, and
18 Chairperson of the Hawaii State Youth Commission.
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OFFERED BY: M. A. Hill (B/R)

