

By: Representatives Felsher, Zuber

To: Rules

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 32

1 A RESOLUTION COMMENDING AND RECOGNIZING THE 14 MIDDLE AND
2 HIGH SCHOOL HOPE SQUADS IN JACKSON COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI, WHICH
3 FOSTER HUMAN CONNECTION, COMMUNITY, AND HOPE BY ELEVATING MENTAL
4 WELL-BEING THROUGH PEER-TO-PEER SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAMMING.

5 WHEREAS, we join the citizens of Jackson County, Mississippi,
6 and the entire state in commending the middle and high school Hope
7 Squad advisors and student members for their laudable work to
8 ensure all seven public middle schools and seven public high
9 schools follow the Hope Squad curriculum in creating a culture of
10 inclusivity and kindness; and

11 WHEREAS, in 2023, teen suicide attempt survivor and national
12 speaker, Emma Benoit, introduced Hope Squad to the Singing River
13 Health Foundation and Jackson County Chamber of Commerce, which
14 had been collaboratively seeking communal initiatives to improve
15 mental health awareness and access, especially in teenagers, since
16 the 2022 suicide death of East Central eighth grader, Sawyer
17 Magee, as an evidence-based curriculum guided by school advisors
18 and led by students; and



19 WHEREAS, the Superintendents from Jackson County's four
20 school districts: Jackson County, Moss Point, Ocean Springs and
21 Pascagoula-Gautier, along with a cadre of their counselors and
22 educators, returned from their investigatory visit with Hope
23 Squads at schools in the Florida Panhandle, accepting Singing
24 River Health Foundation's offer to fund local Hope Squads, along
25 with Chevron, Ingalls Shipbuilding, Mississippi Power, Merchants
26 and Marine Bank, and Navigator Credit Union; and

27 WHEREAS, the 14 Hope Squads in Jackson County consist of 203
28 middle and high school students who were nominated by their peers
29 for their kind, inclusive, and trustworthy reputations, and
30 trained in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer), the nationally
31 recognized suicide prevention method and receive ongoing
32 skill-building lessons; and

33 WHEREAS, the Hope Squads' peer-to-peer approach empowers the
34 203 members across Jackson County to intentionally reach out to
35 peers and become instruments of change, also creating school-wide
36 activities, such as Hope 'Grams, Hope Chains, Hope Trees, festival
37 booths, Cultivating Calmness events and World Kindness Day
38 recognition; and

39 WHEREAS, multiple research studies and articles indicate the
40 significance of peer-to-peer methodology as a worthwhile approach
41 to addressing documented increased levels of anxiety, depression,
42 and hopelessness related to technology use and the impact of
43 COVID-19 among teenagers; and



44 WHEREAS, the K-12 and Postsecondary Mental Health Task Force,
45 composed of legislators, state officials, mental health and
46 education professionals and one student, released an October 2024
47 report recommending the implementation of pilot peer-to-peer
48 programs to help students deal with trauma and promote mental
49 health wellness at the high school, community college, and
50 university levels with appropriate oversight from personnel
51 including administrators and mental health professionals; and

52 WHEREAS, the Hope Squad program is a model that reflects
53 strong community support from its nonprofit and private sector
54 partners who support the students and their Hope Squad activities;
55 and

56 WHEREAS, the Hope Squads include four district coordinators,
57 14 school advisors, and 203 students, all passionate about mental
58 health and well-being, from Colmer Middle School, East Central
59 Middle School, East Central High School, Gautier Middle School,
60 Gautier High School, Magnolia Middle School, Moss Point High
61 School, Ocean Springs Middle School, Ocean Springs High School,
62 Pascagoula High School, St. Martin Middle School, St. Martin High
63 School, Vancleave Middle School and Vancleave High School; and

64 WHEREAS, the Hope Squad program is an exemplary initiative
65 that can serve as a model as the Legislature considers expanding
66 peer-to-peer suicide prevention programs across the state:

67 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF
68 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, That we commend and



69 recognize the Singing River Health Foundation and the 14 Hope
70 Squads in middle and high schools across Jackson County,
71 Mississippi, their outstanding advisors, student members, and
72 community partners for their work providing hopeful environments
73 and encouraging healthy connections among themselves and across
74 their communities.

75 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be furnished to
76 the Singing River Health Foundation Executive Director Laura
77 Sessum and her colleagues and partners, and to the members of the
78 Capitol Press Corps.

