

RESOLUTION NO. _____

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, COUNTY OF SAN MATEO, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

* * * * *

RESOLUTION DECLARING LONELINESS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS IN THE COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

WHEREAS, United States Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, has issued “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation, The Surgeon General Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community,” which highlights the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection, emphasizing the significant impact on mental, physical, and societal health; and

WHEREAS, the physical and mental health consequences of poor or insufficient connection are profound, including an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, dementia, depression, and a higher likelihood of premature death; and

WHEREAS, in San Mateo County in 2022, 45% of residents expressed they were experiencing difficulty with isolation and loneliness. The percentage of residents who didn’t have someone to turn to in the past month if they needed or wanted help increased from 2004 (13.1%) to 2022 (16.1%). Men, adults with lower education or income levels, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, LGBTQ+ respondents and residents of North County more often report they do not have this type of support network; and

WHEREAS, recognizing the multifaceted nature of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection, it is imperative to consider the intersectionality of race and ethnicity in their effects. National studies have identified that social isolation doubles the risk of premature death for Black participants and increases the risk for White participants; and

WHEREAS, within San Mateo County, 35.2% of residents were born outside of the country, highlighting the diverse composition of the community. National research underscores that older immigrants who relocate to another country are particularly susceptible to loneliness, attributed in part to shifts in language, cultural norms, social networks, and experiences of racism and/or discrimination; and

WHEREAS, loneliness and isolation disproportionately impact older adults, contributing to social isolation, loneliness, and poor health outcomes, thereby necessitating targeted interventions such as the Addressing Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults (SILO) Act; and

WHEREAS, the Surgeon General's Advisory on Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation provides a comprehensive framework for a National Strategy to Advance Social Connection, outlining six foundational pillars to address this critical issue; and

WHEREAS, social connection is recognized as a key factor in building individual resilience and improving community well-being, with potential benefits for population health, community safety, prosperity, and civic engagement; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors acknowledges the importance of addressing loneliness and isolation as a critical public health concern in the County of San Mateo, recognizing that social connection is essential for the health and well-being of our residents;

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED that the Board of Supervisors of San Mateo County declares loneliness a public health crisis and commits to adopting a comprehensive approach to address the epidemic of loneliness and isolation in our community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Supervisors of San Mateo County supports the principles outlined in the Surgeon General's Advisory on Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation and commits to examining the possible implementation of existing and new strategies based on the Advisory's six foundational pillars:

1. Strengthening Social Infrastructure: Designing environments that promote connection, establishing community connection programs, and investing in institutions that bring people of all ages together; and
2. Enacting Pro-Connection Public Policies: Supporting policies at the national, state, local, and tribal levels that enhance community connection, such as accessible public transportation and paid family leave; and
3. Mobilizing the Health Sector: Assessing patients for the risk of loneliness and intervening, recognizing the health implications of social isolation; and
4. Reforming Digital Environments: Critically evaluating technology use to ensure that digital interactions do not detract from meaningful and healing connections; and
5. Deepening Our Knowledge: Establishing a robust research agenda to better understand the causes and consequences of social disconnection and the effectiveness of efforts to boost connection; and
6. Cultivating a Culture of Connection: Fostering a culture that promotes positive everyday interactions and norms to enhance relationships; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Supervisors of San Mateo County pledges to continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders, community organizations, and residents to explore further implementation of evidence-based strategies that promote social connection, improve mental and physical health, and create a more resilient and connected community.

* * * * *