A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, TO CONVENE A TASK FORCE, INCLUDING COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL; MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS; PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS, COUNSELORS AND ADMINISTRATORS; SCHOOL UNION REPRESENTATIVES; COMMUNITY GROUPS; AND OTHER INTERESTED PERSONS, TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR PROVIDING MENTAL WELLNESS SPACES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

WHEREAS, various public health measures have been implemented throughout New Mexico to reduce illness and mortality during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, including flattening the curve with measures such as social distancing, quarantining and closing schools; and

WHEREAS, less has been done to implement mental health measures to reduce anxiety, depression and behavioral disorders in the general population and public schools; and

WHEREAS, school districts and charter schools across the state are now coming out of lockdown with cautious optimism, but the pandemic is not yet over and the challenges related to the impact on students' mental health remain largely unknown; and

WHEREAS, recent studies have revealed that students may experience anxiety, depression and behavioral problems during
the pandemic and its aftermath; and

WHEREAS, studies have also shown that the impact on learning during the pandemic has been unprecedented and has left school districts and charter schools across the state grappling with uncertainties on how best to address the challenges facing their personnel and students; and

WHEREAS, educational researchers have advocated that public schools and education policymakers address mental health as a key approach to helping students regain lost academic ground and social-emotional equilibrium during the pandemic and its aftermath; and

WHEREAS, while coronavirus disease 2019 changed the ways in which public schools provide daily lessons and opportunities for learning for students, and those changes affected many students' mental health, the pandemic is not the only stressor students must contend with; and

WHEREAS, bullying, racial tension and childhood trauma are significant contributors to stress and declining mental health, and those stressors have been exacerbated by the pandemic; and

WHEREAS, according to research from the federal centers for disease control and prevention, there is a direct relationship between a student's mental health and academic achievement; and

WHEREAS, overall, child mental health statistics,
including the following, are alarming:

A. one in five students struggle with mental health;

B. approximately one in five students who could benefit from additional mental health support do not receive it;

C. one-half of all mental health conditions start before age fourteen; and

D. behavioral problems, anxiety and depression are the most commonly diagnosed mental disorders in school-aged children; and

WHEREAS, young people spend a majority of their time in various educational environments that play a crucial role in their psychological, physical and social development; and

WHEREAS, public schools have the opportunity to address the mental health of students and support a framework in which students can thrive by offering resources that support their mental health, such as providing a mental wellness space where students can go during the regular school day to have direct access to mental health counselors or simply a space where students are comfortable and can discuss the concerns they are facing; and

WHEREAS, such spaces are not currently being provided to address the mental health needs of students;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that the legislative education study committee, in collaboration with the public education department, be requested to convene a task force that includes committee members and department personnel; mental health care providers; school teachers, counselors and administrators; school union representatives; community groups; and other interested persons to develop a comprehensive plan to enhance student learning and student welfare by providing mental wellness spaces in middle schools and high schools as a strategy for addressing and supporting the mental health of public middle school and high school students; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force gather data and information, including data and information from other states that have instituted mental wellness spaces, to determine the efficacy of mental health spaces and develop standards for mental wellness spaces and their use; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force consider whether a pilot project creating mental wellness spaces in a limited number of public schools and studying the effects of the spaces on mental health and academic achievement is warranted and, if so, the size and term of a pilot project; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the findings and recommendations of the task force be reported to the
legislature and the governor by November 1, 2022; and

    BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
    transmitted to the chair of the legislative education study
    committee and the secretary of public education for
    distribution to school districts and charter schools.