

SCR 14
Proponent Testimony
Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee
6/9/2020

Thank you Chair Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony on SCR 14. I am Kelly Smith, State Program and Policy Director for the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition (MHAC). The MHAC is a statewide member organization actively advocating to increase awareness and advance policies to improve the lives of those impacted by mental illnesses and addiction disorders. The MHAC's membership includes 125 organizations whose members exemplify the diversity of community organizations that have a common interest in behavioral health, including health and human service organizations; the faith-based community; government entities; advocacy organizations; courts; major medical institutions; the corporate arena; and behavioral health agencies serving adults and children.

The death of George Floyd and many other Black Americans not only calls our nation's attention to policing but to the larger issue of racism and its impact on society. Racism is like cancer spreading to other vital organs. It impacts all areas of society such as education, the economy, the legal system, and the health care system. Racism is a driver of inequity in all of these areas. SCR 14 would provide an opportunity to address the root cause of disparities that impact social determinants of health.

Mental health and substance use disorders plague all communities whose experiences lead to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorders, and addiction. In many cases, these behavioral health disorders are preventable and treatable. However, racism and stigma in Black Communities perpetuate these illnesses causing deterioration in overall health and can even lead to early death. Trauma, anxiety, and depression can develop into chronic stress and worry that manifests into cardiovascular disease and hypertension. According to the American Heart Association, more than 40 percent of Black adults have high blood pressure and state that in this population, it develops earlier in life and is more severe.

Five people die by suicide every day in Ohio, and one youth dies by suicide every 33 hours, according to a report released by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). In 2019, the Youth Risk Behavioral Health Survey (YRBS) found that Ohio's Black high school students had the highest rate of suicide attempts in the 12 months before it was conducted. From 2014 to 2018 the suicide rate among Ohio's Black non-Hispanic adult males increased nearly 54%.

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For the second year in a row, Black non-Hispanic males had the highest overdose death rate in Ohio compared to other sex and race/ethnicity groups. The latest data from the ODH shows a reduction in drug overdose deaths from 4,854 in 2017 to 3,764 in 2018. This is the first time Ohio has seen a reduction in overdose deaths since the state began reporting data in 2009. Overdose rates decreased for all gender and race/ethnicity groups. While there were decreases across demographics overall, black males between 55-64 years of age had the highest death rate compared to other groups.

As we are approaching Minority Mental Health Awareness Month in July dedicated to raising these issues, SCR 14 is an important opportunity to seize the moment and mobilize behind efforts to support all Ohioans.