

June 8, 2020

Thank you Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee. My name is Wendelyn Oslock, MBA and I'm here to testify in support of the Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14) declaring that racism is a public health crisis.

As a medical student at The Ohio State University College of Medicine, I have seen the role that racism plays in the lives and outcomes of my patients and fellow trainees. I have also seen the impact of systemic racism as a mother raising her children in South Linden. Today I want to focus on this and how racism in Columbus still shapes the health outcomes of our community.

Many of you know (or should know) that South Linden is a community that was previously redlined. Despite many residents being middle class at the time, their race deemed them risky investments. This racist decision decimated the wealth of communities like South Linden in ways still apparent today when we look at public health priorities like infant mortality.

The resources siphoned away from South Linden as a result of the racist practice of redlining has led to more dated housing infrastructure, which has exposed (primarily low-income, black) children to environmental health hazards. I saw this first hand with my own son.

Some of you with younger children may know that children around the age of 1 year have their finger stuck to check for lead in their blood. When my son had his finger stuck, the lead level was above the cut off considered "safe," though there really is no safe level. We were fortunate that when the test was repeated with a blood draw, the results were normal. Our pediatrician reported that many kids in our neighborhood have lead in their blood from paint chips and also soil. In our case, there was likely dust or dirt on his finger when the initial test was done.

Lead in the soil and from chipping paint has numerous health effects, especially on children who are rapidly developing. In addition to lowering children's IQ, the American Academy of Pediatrics reports that 1 in 5 cases of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is due to lead poisoning.

This is just one example of historic racism and how contemporary inaction continues to have public health consequences. I hope my testimony and the testimony of others make it clear that racism is a public health crisis.

I would like to thank the committee for their time and for being brave enough to move forward on this critical issue. I would also like to thank Sen. Sandra Williams and Sen. Hearcel Craig for sponsoring this resolution. Thank you.