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**Written Testimony in Support of SCR14  
Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee  
June 9, 2020, William Canterbury, Southeastern Ohio Legal Services.**

Chair Burke, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Concurrent Resolution 14.

My name is William Canterbury. I am an attorney with Southeastern Ohio Legal Services, a non-profit law firm serving the civil legal needs of low-income and vulnerable people in Central and Southeastern Ohio. My primary practice area is serving survivors of domestic violence. Much of this work involves civil protection order proceedings, family law, housing, and other matters.

Ohio has long acknowledged domestic violence as a public health issue. The Ohio Department of Health states on its website that "[t]he high prevalence of domestic violence has an enormous cost to society both in health care and productivity." According to the Center for Disease Control, 1-in-4 women, and 1-in-10 men have experienced violence from an intimate partner. In fact, the CDC reports, that nearly half of all female homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner. The CDC goes on: "Although the personal consequences of [domestic violence] are devastating, there are also many costs to society. The lifetime economic cost associated with medical services for [domestic violence]-related injuries, lost productivity from paid work, criminal justice and other costs, was \$3.6 trillion. The cost of [domestic violence] over a victim's lifetime was \$103,767 for women and \$23,414 for men."

So, if we acknowledge domestic violence is a public health issue, that begs the question: What effect if any, does racism have on domestic violence and therefore public health?

One of the biggest obstacles the domestic violence prevention community has is empowering survivors to report abuse and leave violent life-threatening relationships. I want to answer the question I've posed to you by telling you how racism provides additional barriers for survivors to leave these dangerous relationships.

Women of color are more likely to experience domestic violence. "African- American females experience intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white

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females, and about 2.5 times the rate of women of other races.<sup>1</sup>

African-American women suffer domestic violence at higher rates not because of the color of their skin, but because of additional barriers to leaving life threatening relationships.

In working in this practice area for three years now, and serving literally hundreds of domestic violence survivors, I think it would be fair to make a couple generalizations based on my first-hand experience. First, by the time a survivor accesses the legal system, domestic violence has been going on for a while in the relationship. Second, this history of violence is not well reported to law enforcement. Third, when I ask survivors why they did not report previous violence to law enforcement I get two different kinds of answers: Either the survivor believed her abuser would "get better" and did not want to get him in trouble by reporting it to law enforcement, or the abuser threatened the survivor. These threats are either physical violence or that the abuser would do something to take their children away. In other words, either false-hope or fear.

According to the Ohio Supreme Court's 1999 Report of the Commission on Racial Fairness, "Based on its work, the Commission concludes that many minorities perceive that Ohio's criminal justice system discriminates against them because of their race or minority status."

This creates a chilling effect for women of color who are afraid they won't be believed by law enforcement or our justice system because of their skin color, but also because they are afraid that calling the police on an abuser will have a disproportionate impact on that abuser. The National Research Center on Domestic Violence writes, "[a]s a result of historical and present day racism, African-American women may be less likely to report her abuser or seek help because of discrimination, African-American men's vulnerability to police brutality, and negative stereotyping."<sup>2</sup>

Racism makes survivors afraid. Afraid that if they report abuse, they will not be believed because of the color of their skin. Fear that a police response might be a death sentence for their abuser. Fear that if they have children together, reporting that abuse may result in a visit from Child Protective Services.

Racism also takes away hope for survivors. As my colleagues at the Ohio Poverty Law Center will testify today, "One in seven Ohioans live in poverty. For Black Ohioans, the number is nearly one-in-three."<sup>3</sup>

Survivors who live in poverty, my clients, cannot simply get a hotel room for the night if they have been attacked. They often lack transportation to get to family and friends. And even if they can get to family and friends, if they have children, those well-meaning

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1 Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2001.

2 Nash, Shondrah Tarrezz (2005). Through Black Eyes: African American Women's Construction of Their Experiences With Intimate Male Partner Violence. *Violence Against Women*, 11, 1427. Sage Publications

3 <https://www.welfareinfo.org/poverty-rate/ohio>

people simply do not have room for them. When local domestic violence shelters are full, which they often are, there is nowhere to go.

And when they do get out what do they do? How does a low-income Ohioan arrange childcare, without money, so that they can work to get back on their feet? How does a minimum wage income support a single mother and her children? And if she is living out of a domestic violence shelter, or a hotel, or a family member's overcrowded home, what type of impact do you think that is going to have when Children Services becomes involved or a domestic relations court is making a custody evaluation?

These are all problems for low-income Ohioans, but because Black Ohioans are more likely to be low-income, they are more prevalent problems for Black Ohioans.

I am here on behalf of my Black clients who are survivors of domestic violence. The client who did not call the police on her husband because she was afraid with his criminal history that a phone call would lead to their children growing up without a father. I am here for the client who lost residential custody of her children because the home she fled to did not have an appropriate bedroom. I am here for the client who cannot find housing after leaving her abuser because when she looks at apartments she is told there are no vacancies, when white women from the same domestic violence shelter are given applications. I am here for Black clients who are pushed to the poor parts of town like the east side of Newark or the Coal Run neighborhood of Zanesville. Where in those parts of town, neighbors are afraid to call the police when they hear violent arguments, where they are isolated from social resources like hospitals and community spaces.

I am here because domestic violence is a public health crisis. The statistics are clear. Black women are much more likely to be survivors of this violence than their white counterparts. Either you believe there is something wrong with Black people that make them more likely to be abused and killed, or you believe that there is something systemically wrong that causes Black women to be victims. If you believe the problem is with black women, you are part of the problem. If you believe there is something else going on, I invite you to work with the proponents of SCR 14, and work with us in the legal aid community, to end the disproportionate victimhood of our Black communities.

Thank you for again for the opportunity to provide comments on behalf of Southeastern Ohio Legal Services and our clients. I am happy to answer questions and provide follow up if necessary.