

Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee
Senate Concurrent Resolution 14- Proponent Testimony
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Chairman Burke, Vice-Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid committee, I am Tim Burga, President of the state's labor federation, the Ohio AFL-CIO. The Ohio AFL-CIO represents over 1 million active and retired private and public sector union members covering a wide segment of the economy.

With the appalling death of George Floyd at the hands of police officers, caught on video for the world to see, and the subsequent uprising of Americans to denounce racial injustice, the Ohio AFL-CIO will provide our voice and actions for this to be a turning point in American history. Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (S.C.R. 14) is a needed step toward justice and we support its stated premise that the impact of racism on public health deserves action from all levels of government.

Racism plays a menacing role in the daily lives of working people of color. This is a labor issue because it is a public health issue and a workplace issue. As a labor movement, we will continue our role in the struggle for social and economic justice and will add our voice so that we move forward as a state and nation, together to rid society of prejudice, bigotry and racism.

As Ohio's labor movement, we too are angered by the recent deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. What happened to them has happened to far too many unarmed people of color for centuries. The difference now is that we are seeing these tragic events play out on television and on social media. We can't deny these killings are happening, nor can we look away because we feel uncomfortable. We stand strong today in the fight for dignity, life and liberty for everyone at the intersection of economic justice and civil rights.

Although not perfect, labor unions have been important allies of the African-American struggle for freedom and justice. I am proud to say that my home union, the United Steelworkers, and other industrial unions in particular were early supporters of the modern-day civil rights movement. These unions believed that workers of color and their fate was intertwined with that of white workers; that

questions of economic security and anti-discrimination were joined at the hip. And, as a united labor movement, this continues to serve as a guiding principle of the AFL-CIO.

At the time of organized labor's peak influence in the 1960s, race relations, voting rights and economic justice were converging in significant ways. In 1963, A. Philip Randolph, founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and the namesake of AFL-CIO's senior constituency group (APRI), and Martin Luther King, Jr. joined forces in the nation's capitol to execute the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Significant organized labor presence was on hand at the march with UAW President Walter Reuther playing a significant role in the planning and execution of the event.

After the march, Dr. King and other civil rights leaders met with President Kennedy and Vice President Lyndon Johnson at the White House, where they discussed the need for bipartisan support of civil rights legislation. Though they were passed after Kennedy's death, the provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 reflect the demands of the march. I am proud to say that many labor unions and their leaders, including my home union and my father who was a local union president at J&L Steel in Stark County publicly advocated for passage of these landmark bills.

Now, we must recognize it is time to reach another level in our ongoing pursuit for racial harmony and a more perfect union. The Ohio AFL-CIO stands in solidarity against the forces of hate that seek to divide this nation for their own personal and political motive. United in purpose we seek to advance the cause of peace, equality and justice for all.

Let us come together at this moment in time to address and dismantle racism, and as a needed step, pass S.C.R. 14 to expand society's understanding of racism and how it affects individual and population health. We stand in strong support and urge passage of S.C.R. 14 that authorizes the Governor to establish a working group to promote racial equity throughout this state.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to testify in support of S.C.R. 14.