

June 8, 2020

Greetings to Chairman Burke, Senator Sandra Williams, Senator Hearcel Craig, and other honorable members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee:

My name is Angela Abram, and I am submitting this testimony as a private citizen, and as a member of the Christian, faith, in support of declaring RACISM as a public health crisis. I have been an Ohio resident from 1972-1987, 1995 to present time. I live in Reynoldsburg, Ohio.

Race is a social construct that is used to classify people based on physical traits and characteristics of a given group that are distinctly different from another group of people. As a result, socially, people are treated differently by these constructs. While differences and similarities of say the number of freckles a person has is not treated as socially significant, differences in skin color, hair texture, and lip size has been treated as socially significant.

There are assorted physical and genetic variations across humans, who are all created in the image of God, if you follow religious teachings. How these variations form the basis for social judgement, discrimination, supremacy, and oppression has nothing to do with genetics, or humanity, rather it is a phenomenon based on the social construct of external appearance.

Racism then evolves from the belief or acceptance of superiority based on the scale of governmental agreement that these human variations have a ranking. These rankings based on skin color, hair texture have been in place for 400 years in America, and it has cast quite an unsavory shadow on our democracy and the Constitution.

If the premise is all men are created equal, then no human should be treated differently based on these physical traits and characteristics. No genocide of Native American people should have occurred to establish America, but it was. No enslavement of African humans should have occurred to build the economy and structures of America, but it did. No internment camps of Japanese people should have been permitted, but it was.

Oppressive practices such as voter suppression tactics of poll tax, redlining, and gerrymandering, genocide, slavery, and lynchings of have taken a long harrowing toll on the psyche and physicality of both the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressor has developed an inauthentic, false narrative of superiority, and oppressed has developed an unreasonable and unsustainable weight of discrimination, resulting in systemic devaluation, a wealth gap, lowered life expectancies, and disproportionate mortality. That is a health crisis. As a result of long term discrimination, through intentional, internal and systemic racial and economic inequities, certain people will not live as long as other people, based on a physical trait or characteristic. Certain children will not receive the same education, certain expectant mothers will not receive the same prenatal support based on this physical characteristic of skin color?

Each time racism is permitted to continue, and persist, an individual does not reach full potential, does not identify and reveal the gifts of the Creator. Persistent discrimination and oppression, based on physical characterization, followed by stereotyping and prejudging leads to loss of performance, loss of potential, loss of ability.

Areas where racism has impacted the nation has been microscoped during the Covid-19 pandemic is showing up in unequal housing, education, technology access, employment and rate of pay, insurance access, and the criminal justice system. Disparities in health access, health treatment, and health outcomes have been on vivid display, where different outcomes for people are based on their physical characteristics, such as skin color, or gender, or both.

Maternal health is tied to infant health. Black residents have almost 3 times higher rate of infant mortality. Infant mortality is a public health crisis. Premature death before 75 years of age is more likely in Black residents than any other "race" in America. That is a public health crisis. According to the Columbus Public Health Department, African American make up 38 % of hospitalizations, even though they make up 28% of the city's population. This is a public health crisis.

According to the USDA, 22.5% of African Americans and 18.5% of Hispanic households are food insecure, in comparison to the national average of 12.3%. Hunger is a health crisis. Hunger is a racial equity issue. Racism is a public health crisis. Solutions to health equity, and disease and mortality prevention have to be developed and planned. The first step is acknowledging that Racism IS a public health crisis. Leaving ego and defensiveness at the front door, I challenge each and every leader of this community to create legislation that promotes open, honest and transparent dialogue, discussions and laws about tolerance, diversity, inclusion, equity and justice, so that there can be meaningful and substantive change for the health crisis that racism built. Eyes wide open, may we re-examine our humanity, and reclaim the sanctity of what is meet, right, and our bounden duty.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of declaring Racism as a public health crisis.

Respectfully submitted by Angela Abram