

Thank you, Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee. My name is Taraja Shephard Allen, and I am here to support Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14) declaring that racism is a public health crisis. I want to share a story with you about my fears as a mom—you know, what keeps me up at night. My husband and I have 3 children, two boys and a girl.

My oldest is Daylen. We keep him busy. We have no idle hands at our house. Honestly, playing chauffeur, keeps me busy too. Daylen is great swimmer. He has won 1st place for 100 Breaststroke as a freshman and sophomore in Columbus City Schools Championships. He also swims and practices with the YMCA. In season, which is year-round, he must get to practice right after school 5 days a week. He's been catching the bus for several years. My husband and I work and just cannot always get him there. His siblings also have afterschool activities or just need a parent to get them off the bus and get them an after-school snack. What scares me is that he catches two buses and then he must walk through the nice neighborhood of Gahanna to get to swim practice. He often likes to wear his Gahanna Gators Swim Team hoodie. I told him he must take the hoodie off. I don't care if it is cold outside. Also, he must keep his hands out of his pocket. I say if anyone stops him to ask him questions no matter who it was, to just stop and politely answer the questions. Keep answers short and polite. Look down and do not look them in the eye. I should've been more concerned about my son getting off the wrong stop or being approached by strangers offering candy than being approached by someone just because he was black and wearing a hoodie in a nice neighborhood.

He now wants to learn how to drive. I signed him up for a Driver's Ed class. He's now finished. We've been practicing on the roads. He's a very attentive and cautious driver. Yet, what I'm most concerned about is not whether he checks his blind spots or remembers to put on a turn signal before he merges. My fear is what happens if he's driving and the police pull him over. I tell him keep his hands on the wheel and repeat aloud about whatever that they ask him to do. I tell him when he drives, to keep his ID out and registration in plain sight so that he doesn't have to reach into a glove box to get them, to let police search the car if necessary. He asks, "isn't that against my 4th amendment rights?" I ask him what rights he will have if he is shot dead for being uncooperative. I am more concerned with how he handles himself *WHEN*, NOT IF, he gets pulled over. How will he will survive? I am more fearful about him driving while black and encountering the police than I am about him encountering a drunk driver on the road.

I am scared for my Black American teenage son in a racist America. I do not and should not have to teach my son to live in fear. Nor teach him that he does not actually have the same constitutional rights as others just because he's black. However, racism is a public health crisis! Thus, like any vaccination that he has ever received, I know the initial injection hurts, but I do it to save his life!

Thank you for your time! I am open to any questions that you may have.

Taraja Shephard Allen