

Chairman David Burke
Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee

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I support the Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR 14) to declare that Racism is a Public Health Crisis.

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 Elizabeth D. Auckley. I am testifying in support of 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 witnessed how structural racism negatively impacts the health of Black mothers and infants in Columbus, Ohio. The 2016 infant mortality rate in Ohio was 7.4 deaths per 1,000 live births, ranking Ohio 8th for highest infant mortality nationally ([CDC](#)). The same year, the infant mortality rate for White mothers in Ohio was 5.8, but was almost tripled for Black mothers, at a rate of 15.2. This problem is even more dire in Franklin County, where the overall infant mortality rate of 8.7 was higher than all but one state in the entire country. ([ODH](#))

Infant mortality rates have been studied and associated with systemic racism in state-level social policies, leading to fewer resources for Black families, in all 50 states. Specifically, higher household income, higher levels of managerial employment, and higher educational attainment have all been found to be protective against infant mortality for Black families. However, state-level socioeconomic policies that govern these factors perpetuate systemic racism and create a transgenerational danger to the health of Black mothers and their children in Ohio.

In addition to studying about the impact of racism on infant mortality, I have seen the impact of the infant mortality crisis on Black mothers and children through my work with Restoring Our Own Through Transformation (ROOTT) and Moms2B. Despite the work of these two local Columbus organizations to fight racial health disparities in infant mortality and the Ohio

Department of Health's objective, established in 2010, to reduce the infant mortality rate to under 6.0 deaths per 1,000 live births in every ethnic and racial group, the infant mortality rate for Black infants in Ohio has risen every year that data is available since 2012, with the most recent reporting of 15.2 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2016. Conversely, from 2010 to 2016, White infant mortality had decreased from 6.4 to 5.8 deaths per 1,000 live births (Wallace, et al. Health & Place 45:2017).

Infant mortality in Ohio is a critical health problem and disproportionately impacts Black mothers and infants. It is one of many health issues associated with systemic and structural racism and warrants more effective and more aggressive measures to improve the health of Black families.

To reiterate, I support the Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR 14) to declare that Racism is a Public Health Crisis. Thank you Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee for reading this testimony. Additionally, thank you Senator Sandra Williams and Senator Hearcel Craig for sponsoring the resolution. Please forward any questions to elizabeth.auckley@osumc.edu. Thank you for your time.