



## **Advocates for Ohio's Future**

Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 - Proponent Testimony

Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee - June 9, 2020

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and Members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, my name is Kelsey Bergfeld, and I am the Coalition Manager of Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF).

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of SCR 14 which would declare racism a public health crisis and require the Governor to establish a working group to promote racial equity in Ohio.

AOF is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of over 500 state and local health and human services policy, advocacy and provider organizations that strive to strengthen families and communities through public funding for health, human services, and early care & education. We work to empower and support nonprofit organizations in the critical work they do, especially as it relates to lifting up the most vulnerable among us. A number of our member organizations stand with us today and have submitted testimony on behalf of their respective organizations.

As part of AOF's policy platform equity is a consideration of all of our positions and policy proposals. Historically, laws and policies have institutionalized racism and bias against marginalized groups. AOF advocates for policies that provide necessary resources and services to at-risk populations to ensure an individual's well-being and success are not predictable by race, class, geography, language, gender, or other relevant social factors.

Structural, systemic racism has kept people of color behind and many without access to healthcare. We see signs of this throughout the COVID-crisis. According to the Health Policy Institute of Ohio, "Black Ohioans are over-represented in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths. Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, communities of color in Ohio experienced poorer health outcomes, including high rates of diabetes, hypertension and heart disease—conditions research indicates may increase vulnerability to severe COVID-related symptoms."

Like in other public health crises, data is critical to understand and mitigate the spread of disease and minimize fatalities. Disease interventions have to be well timed and necessary. In order to make effective interventions, strengthened collection and reporting of data—disaggregated by race, ethnicity, place and other demographics associated with disparities—to drive critical decisions that must result in better long-term health, and quality of life outcomes for Black Ohioans.

We thank Governor DeWine for recognizing the disparate impact COVID-19 is having on vulnerable populations and Black and Latino communities throughout the state. He created the Minority Health Strike Force to stop the progression of the disease, evaluate and document the impact of the disease, remedy factors that contribute to the spread and procure resources to prevent a resurgence.

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AOF was honored to host a virtual town hall event last week for members of the Minority Health Strike Force Data and Research Subcommittee. This event gave Subcommittee Members the opportunity to hear from community members and organizations about existing gaps in data that exacerbate existing health inequities, the importance of data-driven policies to improve clinical management and health outcomes and how to guide equitable resource allocation for COVID-19 and beyond.

We have also emphasized the need for disaggregated reporting of data from the Departments of Medicaid and Jobs and Family Services to identify where the greatest needs are among populations in the state and to ensure people have access to basic needs services critical for the health and well being of children and families. We must not leave people behind - as the Governor has compassionately stated, “we are all in this together.”

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of SCR 14. We urge you to support SCR 14 and all policies that strive to promote health equity in Ohio.

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