

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 Alessandra Bliss, and I'm here to testify in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14) declaring that racism is a public health crisis.

I am a student leader representing The Ohio State University College of Medicine Pediatric Interest Group. I am a future physician that is passionate about improving the health and care of babies, children, adolescents, and young adults. I emphatically believe that health disparities represent a great injustice in our society but that health disparities among children are a shameful mark of the systemic racism that infests the US healthcare system. Every child deserves the right to grow up healthy, well-nourished, and safe no matter their race, family's income, or zip code. A few examples of health disparities among the pediatric population in Franklin County and Ohio:

- In Franklin County, 2-3 children die before 1 every single week. The infant mortality rate for black babies is 2.5 times that of white babies in Franklin County.
- In Franklin County in 2019, teenagers ages 15-19 had the highest rate of chlamydia infections with the rate amongst Blacks 6.6 times higher than whites. The same is true with gonorrhea, where rates among Blacks were 11.2 times higher than whites.
- Black children in Ohio are more likely to have asthma and to be obese while less likely to have accessible health care, mental health treatment, and dental care when compared to their white counterparts.
- In Ohio in 2010, the Black child poverty rate reached 47.6%, more than double the White child poverty rate, at 18.1%. Poverty is also a chronic stressor that can prove toxic over a child's life. Dr. Nadine Burke Harris – a community pediatrician and the surgeon general of California – has research that proved a direct correlation between stressful childhood experiences and negative health outcomes later in life like heart disease, lung cancer, depression and suicidality.

It is plain to see that poverty, rooted in the systemic racism that has segregated our communities and disenfranchised black families for centuries, is the major contributor to the disparities that plague Ohio's children. Ohio's Black children deserve better. They deserve the recognition that racism is a public health crisis and the resources and support to ensure they can survive and thrive. For a better future for Ohio we must invest in our Black children today.

In closing I'd like to thank the committee for their time and for being brave enough to move forward on this critical issue. I would also like to thank Sen. Sandra Williams and Sen. Hearcel Craig for sponsoring this resolution. Thank you.

Resources:

[https://www.columbus.gov/uploadedfiles%5CPublic_Health%5CContent_Editors%5CCenter_for_Assessment_and_Preparedness%5CAssessment_and_Surveillance%5CReports_and_Files%5CSTDPresentationWeb2013\(2\).pdf](https://www.columbus.gov/uploadedfiles%5CPublic_Health%5CContent_Editors%5CCenter_for_Assessment_and_Preparedness%5CAssessment_and_Surveillance%5CReports_and_Files%5CSTDPresentationWeb2013(2).pdf)

<https://www.columbus.gov/publichealth/programs/infant-mortality-overview/>

http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/docs/CDC_FinalReport.pdf

<https://www.development.ohio.gov/files/research/p7005.pdf>

<https://www.cdfohio.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/07/health-disparities-issue-brief-april-2009.pdf>