

June 7, 2020

To the esteemed members of the Ohio General Assembly Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee:

I am writing to encourage you to support the resolution to “declare racism a public health crisis and promote racial equality”.

Racism is the foundation on which our country was founded and as we know with the recent killings of Ahmaud Abery (jogging), Breonna Taylor (sleep in her bed), and George Floyd (shopping) affects every aspect of the personal, professional and daily lives of Black people in this country.

I could state statistics regarding all of the health, educational, economical, political, and societal disparities that exist in the Black community but I won't because you are already aware. The connection that I need for you to make is that most if not all of these disparities exist because of racism, the discriminatory and oppressive practices perpetrated against Black people, that are ingrained in all of our institutions.

I am a forty-eight year old Black woman who is a twenty-six year veteran Social Studies educator in Ohio. I am educated, economically stable, have medical insurance, and active in service to my community yet in 2012 I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a blood cancer, that is not hereditary nor a common theme in my family's health history.

I believed then as I still do now that this cancer diagnosis was a direct result of the build up of stress in my body as a response to the racism that I have experienced and internalized throughout the sum of my life.

These experiences of racism include:

- Being force-bussed from the Westside of Akron into the Ellet community as part of the Akron Plan experiment during junior high school. This experiment was one-sided, with no White students bussed to my neighborhood, and required that I leave the safety and familiarity of my home community to maneuver the racial politics and daily microaggressions that go along with being educated where I was not wanted solely because of the color of my skin.
- Having a White, male Social Studies teacher tell me that I “would never amount to anything and become a statistic” although I was from a decidedly middle-class family with both parents in the home.
- Having a White parent question my “decision” to teach about the continent of Africa (to an administrator) even though this content is a part of the Ohio Learning Standards for Social Studies and said standards were shared with parents during Open House.

- My mother and former husband physically blocking the birthing room door after the doctor attempted to leave the room “and make a phone call” when all monitor functions indicated that my unborn child was in acute distress.
- Figuring out, based on my layperson comprehension of medical chart information, that a White, male nurse had overmedicated my father while he was in the ICU so that he would sleep through the night and the nurse would not have to provide him with medical services.
- Having a chemotherapy port placed in my arm and a bone marrow biopsy performed on my back on the same day while a nurse held my hand and cried because she was upset only to learn later that these invasive procedures are normally never done on the same day. I understand now that I was scheduled in this way because the scheduler had no concern about me as a human being and that it is believed by medical professionals that Black people do not experience pain that warrants their attention/concern and/or that Black people can withstand high levels of pain.
- Having a White nurse rage in front of my mother, daughter and I because during my first chemotherapy treatment I was moved under her care after the side of the cancer center where I was taking chemotherapy was closing but my treatment was unfinished. She would have never raged let alone felt comfortable expressing any dissent regarding the performance of her job in front of or to a White woman receiving cancer treatment. Because of concern for my future care, my mother made a call to the nursing supervisor and had a note placed in my file directing that I never be assigned to this nurse again while undergoing treatment.

All that I have shared is but a fraction of my life experience with racism. Racism is a problem in this country and while your sphere of influence as legislators does not stretch nationally, you do have the power to address it in Ohio by first acknowledging it.

The resolution to “declare racism a public health crisis and promote racial equality” will be an acknowledgement of racism as a problem in Ohio and free you all to then address legislatively the institutional policies that perpetuate it.

Thank you for taking the time to read and enter this statement into the records of the Ohio Senate Health and Human Services and Medicaid Committee hearing on the resolution to “declare racism a public health crisis and promote racial equality.”

Sincerely,

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