

Jeniece Brock
Akron, Ohio
Witness Testimony for SCR 14

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 Jeniece Brock, Vice President of the Ohio Young Black Democrats and I am here to testify in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR14), which declares that racism is a public health crisis.

I want to share an experience I had just this past week. In a routine trip to the grocery store, I walked towards the entrance. To my left I noticed two caucasian police officers, and immediately “the rules” started to roll through my mind. 1) Don’t put your hands in your pockets. 2) Don’t make any sudden movements. 3) Don’t reach into your purse.

These are the rules I was given as a child in hopes to protect my black body. I’ve always made sure not to violate these rules to ensure that I could return home safely to my family.

Making this trip to the grocery store in the midst of a pandemic, one that is disproportionately infecting, hospitalizing, and killing Black people, I remembered it is essential to wear my mask. But there was a problem. My mask was in my purse. Rule number three says, “Don’t reach into your purse.”

Stress and anxiety overwhelmed me because now I had to choose whether I would risk exposure to a virus that has killed over one hundred thousand people in this country, or risk that the simple gesture of reaching into my purse to grab my mask could be misinterpreted by the officers on my left and possibly not make it home. I chose not to reach in my purse to grab my mask.

No one in this country, in this state, should have to make that decision. No one in this country, in this state, should be under that amount of stress and anxiety for a routine trip to the grocery store.

I earned a Master’s Degree in Health Sciences, so I understand how elevated stress and anxiety has a negative effect on a human’s body. This stress and anxiety experienced by myself and many African-American’s in this state, is result of racism and racial discrimination.

In 2018, the Journal for Behavioral Medicine, published an article titled, “Psychological Pathways from Racial Discrimination to Cortisol in African American Males and Females”. This article tells us that African Americans disproportionately experience poorer physical and mental health outcomes than their White counterparts. It goes on to explain that scholars have suggested that greater exposure to racial discrimination, which is a psychosocial stressor for African-Americans, can accelerate health deterioration.

Racism is literally killing us, and that makes racism a public health crisis. I ask you today to support and pass Senate Concurrent Resolution 14. By declaring racism a public health crisis,

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we can begin taking the necessary steps to create healthier communities in our state and eradicate the institutional racism that Black Ohioans are facing and have faced for decades.

Thank you Senator Williams and Senator Craig for Co-Sponsoring this SCR 14, and thank you to all of the members of this committee for hearing my testimony. I am open to answer questions if you have any.