

June 9, 2020

Thank you Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee. On behalf of the medical student steering committee members of the Columbus Free Clinic, we would like to share our support of the Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14) declaring that racism is a public health crisis.

As one of the several free clinics in Franklin County, we care primarily for patients who are either uninsured or underinsured. We regularly bear witness to how socioeconomic factors contribute to health outcomes. While we cannot speak to the experience of being Black in America, we can attest to the effects of socioeconomic barriers on health outcomes.

One of the programs we offer our patients focuses on providing chronic care and health education for conditions such as hypertension and diabetes. Our patients share the barriers they face in managing these conditions that go far beyond accessing healthcare. They need healthy meals and fresh produce, as well as a safe place to be active. However, for many patients, neither of these is accessible in their neighborhoods. This leads to worsening conditions requiring more medication. We try to provide the resources we can, but as a clinic we are not enough. The cost of medication itself is a challenge. Previously, we provided many medications for patients free of charge, but since we have had to suspend in-person operations due to COVID-19, we have regularly received calls from concerned patients unsure of how to afford a \$10 or \$20 medication that we would ordinarily provide for free. Additionally, monitoring chronic conditions is integral to successful treatment, and patients cannot afford glucose monitors or cuffs to measure their blood pressure.

In Franklin county, Black people have a poverty level three times greater than white people, you can see how this can directly lead to disparities in the problems we have mentioned.¹ Years of unjust laws and unequal access to community resources have continued a cycle causing Black populations to be less likely to have access to higher education, safe housing, etc. They are also more likely to experience higher degrees of chronic stress due to perceived discrimination. Consequently, Black Americans are more likely to experience hypertension, diabetes, cancer, infant mortality, and maternal mortality. While African Americans only make up 23% of our patients, they make 32.6% of our orders for hypertension medications and 35.1% of our orders for diabetes medications. These statistics do not apply just to our clinic, but to every practice in Ohio. Black Ohioans experience diabetes at a rate of 16.0%, while White Ohioans experience diabetes at a rate of 11.3%.² This is a manifestation of systemic racism.

For the health of our patients, we implore you to declare racism as a public health crisis.

Once again, we would like to thank this committee, as well as Senator Sandra Williams and Senator Hearcel Craig who sponsored this resolution, for allowing us the opportunity to share our position.

Signed,
Medical Student Steering Committee of Columbus Free Clinic



1. [https://commissioners.franklincountyohio.gov/COMM-website/media/Documents/FRANK-Report-1-10-Web-Ready-\(Large\)_1.pdf](https://commissioners.franklincountyohio.gov/COMM-website/media/Documents/FRANK-Report-1-10-Web-Ready-(Large)_1.pdf)
2. "The Impact of Chronic Disease in Ohio: 2015" by Ohio Department of Health, 2015