



Senator Hearcel F. Craig
15th Senate District

Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee
Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 Sponsor Testimony
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June 9, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee for the opportunity to bring before you Senate Concurrent Resolution 14, which would declare racism a public health crisis in Ohio and establish a working group that would promote racial equity in the state. The intent of the resolution is to “build alliances with governments and organizations that confront racism, promote racially equitable economic and workforce development, and have Ohioans acknowledge and recognize racism as a public health crisis.”

Racism has adversely and significantly impacted the lives of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islander Americans, and Indigenous People not only in Ohio, but across the nation. Several studies have shown that racism itself is a social determinant of health and can be lethal. The COVID-19 pandemic and the senseless murder of George Floyd have brought a resurgence of conversation surrounding the historical and contemporary systemic injustices so deeply embedded in our society that they touch everything; from what economic opportunities a person has to what zip code they reside in. During the pandemic, we saw that minorities are disproportionately represented in jobs considered essential, but have much lower median wages than their white counterparts. We’ve seen minorities get cited by police for violating social distancing rules at higher rates than their white counterparts. All the while, minority communities are becoming infected and dying from the coronavirus at higher rates due to having higher rates of chronic conditions; chronic conditions which can be directly traced back to slavery, Jim Crow laws, and other racist government policies.

This resolution comes at a time when Ohio’s local leadership from Franklin County, Cuyahoga County and soon to be Hamilton County, as well as Ohio’s congressional delegation and leaders from all across the country are also passing similar resolutions, as they begin to recognize that coronavirus and racism are both public health emergencies. This emergency resolution declares racism a public health crisis that impacts all members of our society and, as such, deserves direct and prompt action from all levels of government.

Our resolution wants to reverberate the disparities that are inextricably linked in health care, Ohio's prisons, the digital divide within education and healthcare services, economic opportunities, our education system, more likely to be uninsured, and access to affordable and adequate housing. By declaring racism a public health crisis, the Ohio General Assembly will acknowledge that racism impacts all members of our society and deserves action from all levels of government. Actions resulting from this declaration include:

- defining terms concerning racism and health equity
- starting educational efforts to address and dismantle racism as well as to expand the understanding of racism and how it affects individual and population health
- promoting community engagement on issues of racism
- committing to review codified ordinances with a racial equity lens
- committing to look at how the government hires and promotes its employees, selects vendors and chooses grant recipients with a racial equity lens
- promoting policies that prioritize the health of people of color and mitigate exposure to adverse childhood experiences or trauma
- requiring that elected officials, staff, funders and grantees receive training on workplace biases and how to mitigate them
- encouraging community partners and stakeholders in the education, employment, housing, and criminal justice and safety arenas to recognize racism as a public health crisis
- securing resources to successfully accomplish the above activities

Since the Statehood of Ohio in 1803, laws have been enacted that have explicitly, implicitly and unintentionally impacted minorities. The impact of black laws, Jim Crow, segregation, and red-lining – even when repealed – still deeply affect African American and minority communities throughout our state. We recognize that this resolution is a much needed first step to racial equity and is not the overall solution. Ohio has the opportunity to be the first state to declare racism a public health crisis in the nation. We have been given a national platform to be trailblazers in providing equity to ALL Ohioans. Ohio will not be able to move forward or prosper as a state, if it doesn't guarantee opportunities to every resident, regardless of their race.

I respectfully ask for your support of SCR 14. Once again, Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to bring SCR 14 before you. Senator Williams and myself would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have at this time.