



Written Testimony Supporting SCR 14
Submitted to the Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee
June 8, 2020
By the Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County (ADAMH)

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 provide testimony in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 14, which declares racism a public health crisis and promotes racial equality. My name is Dr. Kevin Dixon, and I am Vice President of Community and Cultural Engagement for the Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County also known as ADAMH.

Racism is a public health crisis that has negatively impacted the health, mental health and overall well-being of African Americans in America since chattel slavery to present day. That racism in its myriad forms, has created interpersonal, institutional, and structural barriers in a procrustean system that has negatively impacted African Americans in all areas of life that include health, criminal justice, education, employment, housing, and other social determinants of health.

According to Mental Health America, it is this historical adversity that translates into the socioeconomic disparities experienced by African Americans today. Socioeconomic status, in turn, is linked to mental health: People who are impoverished, homeless, incarcerated, or have substance abuse problems are at higher risk for poor mental health.

Despite progress made over the years, racism continues to have a tremendous impact on the mental health of African Americans. Negative stereotypes and attitudes of rejection have decreased, but continue to occur with measurable, adverse consequences. Historical and contemporary instances of negative treatment have led to a mistrust of authorities, many of whom are not seen as having the best interests of African Americans in mind.

The U.S. Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health indicates that adult Black Americans are 20% more likely to report serious psychological distress than white adults; and African Americans who live below the poverty line are three times more likely to report serious psychological distress than those living above. African Americans are more likely to be victims of serious violent crime than whites – making this more likely to meet diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder. Also, African Americans are twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to be diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Reports from the Ohio Department of Mental Health Minority Concerns Committee in 1989 and 1991 indicated that African Americans and other populations of color are often misdiagnosed, over-medicated, over-hospitalized, given greater severity of diagnosis, and under-utilize community-based care in the state of Ohio.

These disparities will continue to threaten the health and well-being of African Americans and other citizens of color until individuals, employers, educators, health care providers, media professionals, financial institutions and legislators recognize and prioritize these issues.

As an African American man witnessing the recent outpouring of support for racial equality in all areas of our country, I am filled with hope and determination for the young people of color in our country. ADAMH and I want to make sure that Ohio is a part of this movement to declare what we have known for many years – that racism is a public health crisis and should be addressed at the interpersonal, institutional, and structural level.

I urge you to support this resolution and thank you for your consideration.