

Ohio Senate Concurrent Resolution 14  
Declare Racism A Public Health Crisis/Promote Racial Equality  
Witness Testimony by Maria L. Ferrara

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Committee for allowing me to provide this testimony today.

I am here today strongly in favor of Resolution 14. I am not here on behalf of a political party, a corporation or any organization. I am here because I have to ask myself, everyone of this committee and everyone of Ohio, who are we as a society if we do not advocate for the citizens who cannot and should not always have to advocate for themselves?

With this resolution, Ohio will have the opportunity be at the forefront of change that has been long overdue. Systemic racism is not just a phrase that we can mark off on the political Bingo board when attempting to verbalize how deeply these issues and oppressions go. For those that who have lived and still live in its reality today, they know how every move, every breath, every step can be met with hardship and heartache. Carrying the weight of 400 plus years of the cards being stacked against you is enough to bring any person to their knees and that weight is built into your life and brings you down before you've even learned to walk.

This year has been full of many trials and tribulations and has been overflowing with fear. Whether that be from the repercussions of COVID and the subsequent job losses, health concerns, economic concerns, medical costs. etc or from the current political climate or from the events that have brought us to this resolution and in this room today. People are scared. There is fear and anxiety and depression and these diseases of despair clutch around our hearts, making some days feel like getting out of bed is an accomplishment. Now, for a lot of people, they have not experienced such on-going feelings prior to all of this and will suffer mental and emotional trauma as we return to our new normal. But for people of color, that fear exists every day since the day they are born for generation after generation. And as they become parents, it exists for themselves and for their children. And to have to accept in their heart that existence alone will bring pain and suffering.

Let today be the day we, the constituents, you honorable Chairman and Committee, and the Ohio governing body say, "no more."

Let us say no more and accept with this resolution that the history of racism including redlining and segregated schooling is still affecting black families, their communities and their ability to start businesses.

Let us say no more and not only listen, but treat black patients with the seriousness they deserve in our medical facilities especially in regards to the mothers and their infants who have mortality rates far higher than whites.

Let us say no more to families being held in poverty, children going hungry and access to high-quality education being denied to communities because they weren't deemed important enough for additional funding.

Let us say no more and provide these communities resources, funding, activities, counseling, educational and employment opportunities.

Let us say no more to platitudes and letting things blow over. Let us do these things not just with words, but with action and legislation. With this resolution and the working group proposed in it.

This will not only be a benefit to the races and communities that need it most. By passing this resolution and bringing awareness to racism as a health crisis, we will be educating all of our Ohioans. With awareness can come compassion and empathy and a far better understanding of struggles others suffer that I or many may never know personally.

A healthy, educated, socially conscious Ohio is a strong Ohio.

Your citizens are begging, pleading and hoping for concrete action. Please heed the call and allow restitution to begin for all that has been lost because of the color of one's skin. Be the leaders that when the future looks back on this moment, they see we didn't choose to make this about right or left because we could see clearly that this is about right or wrong. We did not have to make this a political decision, because we saw it was a moral decision. It can begin with us and this resolution today.

I appreciate the time of the Chairman and the Committee; this concludes my testimony. Thank you.