

## Written Proponent Testimony

Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee

Senate Concurrent Resolution 14

Submitted by Patricia Temple Gabbe, MD MPH,  
Professor of Pediatrics, Obstetrics and Gynecology

The Ohio State College of Medicine

Founder, Moms2B

June 9, 2020

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of SCR 14. I commend and thank Senators Hearcel Craig and Sandra Williams for introducing this critically important resolution.

### I See Racism Every Day

I know racism is a significant public health crisis in Ohio because I see racism every day in Columbus. How do I “see racism?” I see it in the disparities in infant deaths in our neighborhoods, in our cities and in our state. We measure the quality of our public’s health by the infant mortality rates, the death of a live born infant in its first year of life. In Columbus, in our major Ohio cities and in our state, we woefully fail to meet standards. Black infants die two to three times more often than White infants. It’s been this way for generations. Why should that be? How can we fix it?

Ten years ago, I started Moms2B, an Ohio State Wexner Medical Center program to eliminate disparities and address the social determinants of maternal and infant health in Columbus. We began Moms2B with a strong Black-White coalition and located our pregnancy group program in our eight Columbus neighborhoods with the highest rates of Black infant deaths. Over 3,000, mostly Black and Brown, pregnant women and their support person have enrolled in our Moms2B and our Dads2B programs. From our Moms and Dads, we learn the hard reality of why disparities exist. We see repeated evictions that uproot families and prevent children from sleeping and learning in a safe environment. We hear about the impact of hunger and lack of access to good, healthy food while pregnant. We hear how losing a job while pregnant, without maternity benefits leads directly to an eviction and the homeless shelter. We hear how taking two hours on public transportation can make you late for a job, or for an appointment and cause you to lose your job.



We have learned firsthand, the stories of racism. We see Black fathers in our Dads2B program, struggling to find work that will pay the utilities and the rent and put food on the table. Yes, this does happen in White families too. But, for Black families there has been structural discrimination, for generations. There have been real estate covenants, banks red-lining and freeways built through once vibrant neighborhoods. All of these stressful, local events directly affect the health of our Black families.

Why disparities in infant deaths? Today, Black babies bear the burden of generations of stress and unequal treatment. They are too often born very early in their Mom's pregnancy. They struggle to breathe in our hospital NICU's, to survive those early days, weeks and months of life. They start life at a disadvantage. They live in poorer neighborhoods, more often in a homeless shelter, and go to poorer schools, with disabilities from prematurity. They grow up with the same chronic conditions as their parents, living with more asthma, hypertension, diabetes, severe anemia, anxiety and depression from life's circumstances, through no fault of their own.

Structural racism can be torn down; implicit racism takes time. I remember my own implicit bias. Even though I am determined to eliminate disparities, I did not know the extent of the anger, the unfair treatment and attitudes of those that feel superior; I did not realize the fear Black families feel when they send their Black sons and daughters out into their neighborhoods. I believed, as most of my friends and colleagues that discrimination was in the past. I believed that by electing a Black president and First Lady we could say "there is no racism" in America; but we all saw George Floyd's murder and Ahmaud Arbery chased down for a "citizens' arrest."

I have seen how our own Moms2B and Dads2B programs have eliminated disparities in infant deaths. We have changed the public health measure of racism. We have lowered infant death rates. I see, to paraphrase the great orator, Fredrick Douglass, --we can grow healthy children and we must grow healthy children; this is the only way to heal the broken man and to heal our public health crisis.

Ohio can tear down structural racism. We can eliminate unequal treatment in evictions, in housing, in policing. We can create stable housing and quality early learning centers in all of our neighborhoods. I see hope as do many of my Black friends. I see Black-Brown-White, young and old, marching peacefully together, demanding and creating equal treatment for all.

Thank you.

Dr. Pat Gabbe