

Thank you Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee. My name is Rinki Goswami and I am writing to testify in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14) declaring that racism is a public health crisis.

I am a recently graduated physician from Wright State University. Prior to that I worked in public health in Washington DC. These experiences have allowed me to witness the blatant disparity in healthcare especially by race. During my time in hospitals in Dayton, I have heard many physicians make disparaging comments about our patients based on their race. The worst example of this occurred when a physician I was working with was prepping for our next patient and she informed me she was concerned because the patient was a black woman and she just 'did not get black women'. The entire patient interaction was negative, the patient requested help with certain services, the physician denied them and then requested for her to leave because she could not help her. Our next patient was a white woman and requested the same services and received them. I have also heard a local health director make the comment 'If one extra black baby dies, everyone goes crazy' when discussing strategies to reduce infant mortality in the county. When this is the attitude of the leadership tasked with improving health outcomes in our communities - how can we not consider racism a public health emergency?

As a woman of color I have had my concerns ignored on more than one occasion. A couple years ago I presented to my primary care doctor with the symptoms of a brain tumor. I was turned away being told I was just anxious. Because of my connections in the medical community I was connected with a specialist, received the MRI and was subsequently diagnosed with a brain tumor. How many other patients of color are neglected by their primary care providers and have no other avenue to address their health concerns? How many have died because of the stereotype of anxiety in women of color - I certainly could have been one of them if not for my academic pursuits.

While most instances of racism in our healthcare system are less obvious and more subversive, the fact that this happens in Ohio today is horrifying. As the statistics show, black patients have significantly higher rates of mortality from chronic disease, and have higher rates of maternal and infant mortality at 3-4 times that of white patients. We even see this disparity in healthcare with whether new mothers are coached on how to breastfeed (turns out about 56% of new black mothers leave the hospital breastfeeding while 76% of new white mothers leave the hospital breastfeeding. This is concerning.

Recently in Dayton - Good Samaritan Hospital was closed - and it provided healthcare to a large community of color. The next nearest hospital is several miles away and still does not have direct public transportation. Alongside the healthcare vacuum left in that community, there was also a loss of business as shops and dining areas closed because there were no hospital employees to patronize those businesses. The only grocery store soon followed leaving yet another food desert in a community now without a significant healthcare presence.

The effects of racism is seen in our schools, our parks, our policing, and worst of all in our healthcare system. With the impending next wave of COVID-19 - which we know disproportionately affects communities of color - we MUST prepare. This resolution will allow resources and hopefully mitigate the effects of the virus and save lives. Without healthy communities the great state of Ohio will become a shell. I implore you to please pass this resolution and provide the resources we need to address systemic racism in public health.

I thank the committee for your time, and I thank Senator Williams and Senator Craig for sponsoring this resolution. I am always happy to answer any follow up questions.