



LYNANNE GUTIERREZ

Policy Director & Legal Counsel

lgutierrez@groundworkohio.org

mobile: 614-204-6106

4041 N. High St., Ste. 204

Columbus, Ohio 43214

**Ohio Senate
Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee
Senate Concurrent Resolution 14
Lynanne Gutierrez
Groundwork Ohio
June 9, 2020**

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the committee, my name is Lynanne Gutierrez and I am the Policy Director and Legal Counsel at Groundwork Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR14) which would declare racism as a public health crisis in the State of Ohio and establish a working group to promote racial equity in Ohio.

Groundwork is a statewide, nonpartisan advocacy organization that champions high-quality early learning and healthy development strategies from the prenatal period to age five, that lay a strong foundation for Ohio kids, families and communities. Our vision is to make Ohio the best place to be a young child so that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Groundwork is led by Executive Director, Shannon Jones, and governed by a robust advisory committee of child-focused health and education experts from across the state.

The data and science demonstrate unequivocally that racism contributes to health inequities in the United States and the State of Ohio. We underscore all the research and data cited in SCR 14 including from the American Medical Association, American Public Health Association, and the Health Policy Institute of Ohio among others. Our organization has long recognized the disparities across our state and advanced early childhood investments as targeted, evidence-based strategies to try to create a fair playing field for children of color, children living in poverty and children living in rural areas. Our public facing, intentional commitment to advancing equitable outcomes for young children began in 2018 with a thorough evaluation of the data which confirmed our experience, intuition and work anecdotally in the field. The [Ohio Early Childhood Race & Rural Equity Report](#), a data story spanning 26 metrics across a child's life from prenatal care to postsecondary attainment exposed a more complete story of what it means to be a young child in Ohio. It illustrated how the color of your skin and where you live determine where you start in life, and often where you stay—children who start behind, stay behind. Among the report findings, the following are a sampling of the bottom-line data that demonstrate how race determines health and education for our youngest Ohioans and their families:

- The rate of maternal mortality for white women is 11.5 for every 100,000 births and 29.5 for black women, more than double that of white women. More than half of Ohio's maternal deaths are preventable;
- Black babies are more than 2.5 times more likely to die before their first birthday compared to white babies;
- Black children ages 0-5 are nearly three times more likely to live in poverty than white children;
- Black children are much more likely than their white peers to be accessing publicly funded child care, but are less likely to be in a high-quality program;
- Only 24% of black children show up to kindergarten ready to learn compared to 47% of white children;
- Black kindergartners are 7 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than white kindergartners—and that gap increases to about 9.5 times more likely by 2nd grade;
- Black children are far more likely to have adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)—61% of black children have had at least one ACE compared to 40% of white children.

www.groundworkohio.org

Groundwork Ohio is a fiscally-sponsored project of Community Initiatives

As the public health and economic devastation of COVID-19 has ravaged the State of Ohio and the nation, it has laid bare and, yet again, confirmed that the public systems that are supposed to protect the most vulnerable among us are often undermining these same children, families and citizens. The failure to view policy choices and systems-building with a racial equity lens has resulted in our systems affirming and even exacerbating the racial and geographic disparities that have been perpetuated for decades by institutional racism and structural inequities.

The evidence of systemic racism has been abundant, longstanding, and indisputable in our country and has once again been made clear by the senseless and dehumanizing death of George Floyd. As we honor the lives of those who have been killed—and the many more who have felt threatened, less-than, or forgotten—as a result of systemic and individual biases, we recognize our obligation to do better. Like many on the Statehouse grounds today and across the State of Ohio, we are grieving, and we are angry, and we are heartbroken. But we are also resolved. Resolved to approach our work with more urgency and vigor to reform the unjust systems that have persisted for far too long, undermining the health and wellbeing of black children and families.

We are calling for the successful passage of SCR 14 as evidence of this body's willingness to join us alongside individuals and communities across the state to not only challenge personal and institutional assumptions about race and racism, but to also act urgently to dismantle structural racism in the walls of this building and the systems, agencies and institutions that serve Ohio's black children and families. We commit to you today that we will engage with you as partners in this most important work with grace and humility. Thank you.