

June 8, 2020

To the esteemed members of the Ohio General Assembly Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, I am writing to encourage you to support SCR 14 as introduced declaring racism a public health crisis and promoting racial equality.

I am a 44-year-old wife and mother of 2 teenagers; a 16-year-old female and an 18-year-old male. My testimony is to highlight how racism has traumatized my family; specifically, my children.

The experiences I am going to highlight began much like the situation that pre-empted the senseless, terroristic, brutal murder of George Floyd. It is but by the grace of GOD, that they did not end the same. Businesses all too often weaponizing the police against black and brown bodies, causing many traumatizing and unnecessary interactions between law enforcement and minorities.

Experience #1: In May 2020, just a few days before George Floyd, was brutally terrorized and murdered on the streets of Minneapolis, the police was called on my daughter and husband by the MicroCenter located at Eastgate Shopping Center, 1349 SOM Center Rd, Mayfield Heights, OH 44124. My husband and daughter were at the store to purchase an iPad. Not 15 minutes after the purchase, my daughter opened the box only to discover the screen was cracked. They immediately returned to the store to ask they address what they felt would be an easy to fix to their issue. In response to my husband asking for either a refund or another device, he was met extreme resistance and was told it was his problem. It was even insinuated multiple times throughout his exchange with store personnel that he and my daughter were attempting to scam the store out of the device and that *they* somehow had damaged the iPad. As my husband grew agitated and rightfully so, store personnel proceeded to antagonize him further, at one-point even berating him about “looking at them when they were speaking to him” and at that point calling the police. Once the police arrived, my daughter observed the police immediately engage with store personnel and say, “the customers

This happened during the holiday weekend, while my husband was on his way to work, and with my daughter in tow. My husband knowing how interactions go with black men and police, did not want to escalate the situation further, so he left the merchandise at the store and proceeded to contact their corporate office. This eventually led to the store doing what they should’ve done in the first place, which was exchange the device for another. Needless to say, we will never patronize this chain of stores again.

Experience #2: In September 2017, my husband and son had law enforcement unduly called on them by a security guard at Dillard’s Dept. store located in Beachwood Mall, Beachwood, Ohio. My daughter was going to homecoming and my son decided to escort her but had nothing to wear for the occasion. My husband took my son to the mall and they purchased some True Religion pants from the True Religion store located inside the mall. They had entered the mall through the Dillard’s Dept. store requiring that they also exit through there. My husband went ahead of my son to get their car and as he’s pulls up to the door, he observes my son in handcuffs. My son precedes to tell him that the Dillard’s security guard tackled him from behind with no warning and called police. The security guard proceeds to lie and state he observed my son stealing some True Religion pants from the Dillard’s store. As the police arrive, my husband shows them the receipt for the pants, only for them to not immediately release my son, but instead proceed to tell my husband that he fit a description of someone that stole some glasses from an eyewear store in the mall. Again, only after taking the risk to protest the unlawful detainment, did they finally let my son go. Needless to say, we do not patronize this store any longer either.

I have shared just a fraction of my family's experiences with racism as we have had others. But I wanted to specifically point out how racism is traumatizing and harming our black and brown children. The Black community across the country is tired of being accosted, traumatized and murdered when we are shopping while black, jogging while black, sleeping while black, eating ice cream on our couch while black, legally carrying while black, committing minor traffic offenses while black, getting skittles and an ice tea and walking home while black, being a kid playing with a toy gun while black, learning while black, protesting while black and just plainly living while black. Racism in Ohio is pervasive, and it is my hope that state legislators not only acknowledge there is a problem, but enact meaningful legislation to dismantle racist and discriminatory policies and practices in education, policing and the judiciary, human services, health care and all other institutional systems.

Thank you for taking the time to read and enter this statement into the records of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee hearing on the resolution to declare racism a public health crisis and promote racial equality.