

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 Jass Kaur and I'm writing to testify in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR14) declaring that racism is a public health crisis, and to ask the Governor to establish a working group to promote racial equity in Ohio.

As a medical student in Ohio, I have been told in class that potential risk factors for certain illnesses include being African American or Black. Now that makes me wonder, why would the color of someone's skin be a risk factor for cardiovascular disease or any other illness? Skin color is based on melanin and melanin **does not** increase your risk of cardiovascular disease. What is the common factor that makes People of Color and Blacks more susceptible and more likely to die from these illnesses?

I learned about social determinants of health, the social factors that influence health outcomes. An example of a social determinant of health can include someone's geographical location represented by a zip code. Although the distance between zip codes can be only fifteen minutes, they can lead to drastically different health outcomes. I witnessed this first hand when I moved from Cleveland, Ohio to a surrounding suburb. Even as a child, I noticed how this suburb, which was only fifteen minutes away from where I used to live, had more grocery stores, more hospitals and a superior education system. More grocery stores translates to adequate access to quality food, which leads to lower rates of obesity and better health outcomes. More hospitals translates to adequate access to health services and better health outcomes. Improved education systems translates to better health literacy and better health outcomes.

While I was taught about these social determinants, we failed to discuss what *causes* them. Racism, which includes unconscious, conscious, and systemic aspects, causes these social determinants and negatively impacts the lives and healthcare of Black Americans every day.

As a future physician, I will not accept that Black Americans are more susceptible to illness because of the level of melanin in their skin, which has nothing to do with other comorbid illnesses. I want to address the *why* to prevent these illnesses in Black Americans. In order to be a better physician and advocate for the health of **all** my patients including those who are Black, I am advocating for racism to be a public health crisis.

Thank you Senators Sandra Williams and Hearcel Craig for introducing this resolution. Thank you Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee for taking the time to read my testimony. Please reach out to me if you have any questions.