

Letter to Ohio Senate on Racism as a Public Health Crisis

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 Sat Kartar Khalsa, I'm a medical student at the Ohio State University of College of Medicine and I'm here to testify in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14) declaring that racism is a public health crisis.

While people are out protesting in the streets against police brutality, it's important that we as a community take a stand against racism and its effects on the health of marginalized communities. Almost every health crisis disproportionately affects Black people and other people of color. Diabetes, heart attacks, hypertension, Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease, obesity etc. With all of these underlying conditions, COVID-19 has also disproportionately affected Black people in the last three months. And while we have declared many of these diseases public health issues, we have yet to get to the root of the problem on why many of these "lifestyle diseases" affect Black people and other minorities disproportionately.

Racism and implicit biases of people in every sector affect the health of minorities. This is true nationwide but also specifically in Columbus. Columbus has the highest rate in the country of police killings of Black people compared to their white counterparts. With relatively equivalent rates of crime among different races, racism, prejudices and implicit bias clearly play a role in how those in authority treat minorities in Columbus, thus affecting their health.

I currently research how sex trafficking disproportionately affects Black people in Columbus. A recent report by the Ohio Attorney General's Office estimated that 93% of identified victims in Ohio were female, and of these, approximately half (44%) were non-White, which indicates that sex trafficking disproportionately affects women of color in Ohio. Women of color are then also more likely to endure serious complications of physical and sexual violence during their time as a sex trafficking victim. This kind of physical and sexual violence lead to broken bones, head injuries such as concussions and hematomas, vaginal bleeding, rectal trauma, enuresis and so many other health complications. These conditions must be taken into consideration when addressing health disparities. Racism and prejudices affect minorities heavily which in turns affect their health and well being. If racism is declared a public health crisis, health disparities can be addressed at the root of the problem and health care providers will have the appropriate infrastructure to effectively work to end health inequity.

I would like to thank the committee for their time and for being brave enough to move forward on this critical issue. I would also like to thank Sen. Sandra Williams and Sen. Hearcel Craig for sponsoring this resolution. Thank you.

Sat Kartar Khalsa