

June 9th, 2020

Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee:

Thank you for allowing us to provide this testimony. We represent medical student members of the American Medical Association chapter at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. We would like to express our support for Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14) declaring racism as a public health crisis in the state of Ohio.

On May 19th, 2020, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution recognizing racism as a public health crisis. Citing vast health disparities that exist between Black and White Ohioans, the Commissioners acknowledged how generations of oppression have threatened the health and well-being of Black Ohioans. The physiologic impact of racism, enforced for too long through unjust laws and social institutions, has left Black Americans at higher risk of COVID-19, maternal mortality, coronary artery disease, and more.

The data supports this. In Ohio, a Black infant is almost three times more likely to die than a white infant<sup>1</sup>. Despite making up only 13% of the population, Black people make up 25% of COVID-19 cases in the state<sup>2</sup>. While 11.1% of white Ohioans are diagnosed with diabetes, 17.1% of Black Ohioans are diagnosed. Black Ohioans have a 79% higher death rate due to diabetes than their white counterparts<sup>3</sup>.

As medical students, we have witnessed firsthand the racial health disparities among Americans. We have seen how a lack of access to safe housing, transportation, and healthy foods in predominantly Black neighborhoods is reflected in the health outcomes of our patients. At free clinics, Black patients have uncontrolled diabetes or high blood pressure due to barriers accessing medication management. We have listened to Black patients tell us their concerns are not taken seriously elsewhere. One Black mother opened up to our class about receiving a diagnosis that her son had Down's Syndrome. Though she suspected her son needed more care since birth, her questions and concerns were dismissed as being loud and overzealous.

Although we know racism manifests in many ways, one of its most insidious forms is police violence. The deaths of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville are not isolated incidents. In our state capital, the Columbus Division of Police (CPD) shot and killed 13-year-old Tyre King in 2016<sup>4</sup>. Tasjon Tyreek Osbourne, Julius Ervin Tate Jr., and Montae Shackelford are just three of the 27 Black men and women killed by CPD in the past 7 years<sup>4</sup>.

Police violence disproportionately affects Black communities in Columbus — a Black man is five times more likely to be killed by police than a white man<sup>5</sup>.

In committing ourselves to the health and safety of our patients, we cannot stand by and silently witness these disparities. When Black Americans continue to be killed by the police, we must speak. When the continuation of racist practices and policies impacts the health and safety of our patients, we must act. Guided by the work of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) and Black physicians who shed light on issues of racial inequity, we are writing because Ohio legislators must recognize that racism is a public health crisis that affects the lives of millions in the communities that they represent.

When patients are dying, physicians act. **Right now, our Black patients are dying, and we cannot stand idly by.** We must do what we have pledged to do as future medical professionals — protect our patients. **We demand that racism be classified as the public health crisis it is.**

We would like to thank the members of this committee and the sponsors of this legislation, Senators Sandra Williams and Hearcel Craig for allowing us the opportunity to voice our opinion on this matter.

Signed,

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Members of the Medical Student Section of the American Medical Association at OSUCOM

**References:**

1. <https://mih.ohio.gov/Portals/0/Documents/2018%20Ohio%20Infant%20Mortality%20Report.pdf?ver=2020-02-28-163807-837>
2. <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/dashboards/key-metrics/cases>
3. <https://mih.ohio.gov/Portals/0/Medical%20Expert%20Panel/Diabetes%20White%20Paper%20Version%202.2.pdf>
4. <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/?fbclid=IwAR3eeK5-zFDapo0am-KP7poDWk9GqOk1pgLLPWmN87qzTkRNXIe936sUYXY>
5. <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/cities>