

Dear Gathered Representatives,

I am writing to express my support for the declaration of racism as a public health crisis in Ohio.

Much has been written on the extensive effects of systemic racism on the health and well being of Black, indigenous, and other people of color.

This combined effect, coined by Dr. Arline Geronimus as, “weathering”, encompasses a spectrum of causes and effects supported by years of data and research.

The current pandemic has accentuated the cavernous divisions among us - particularly for Black and Indigenous people. As the hospitalization and death rates for those groups are many times the rate of white people and the efforts to control the virus have been heavily militarized against these communities even during crises.

As we come out of this turbulence those divisions threaten to be even starker (covid relief is already being distributed unequally). And indeed, the spread of infection across communities and workplaces (data shows that though COVID-19 first arrived in wealthy communities, it quickly spread to others, and will continue to cycle) has shown us that we are truly an interdependent system, and our common wellbeing is greatly influenced by the level of equity among us.

It is my hope that the declaration of racism as a public health crisis will address the many ways that systemic racism affects the health of Black people, Indigenous people, people of color and everyone in our great State.

I hope that our elected representatives will work with the community to answer some key questions about how this acknowledgement will be implemented

How will it address the harmful effects of the wealth and income gap on the ability of Black people to secure the resources, food, housing, healthcare and sustainability needed to achieve well-being?

How will it address the need to explicitly defund the heavily militarized and brutal system of policing (forged from a history of slave patrols and immigrant abuse), which data has clearly shown is one of the most prevalent threats against Black life (“black men face about a 1 in 1,000 chance of being killed by police over the life course” - National Academy of Science)?

How will it address the healthcare gap experienced by so many Black people, most evident in the Black maternal mortality rate?

How will it address how the war on drugs has both caused extreme harm to the infrastructure of Black communities, and left little funding and energy for real crime prevention (through

economics, education, and health), as well as ignored the mental and emotional health needs of Black people?

How will it address the overwhelmingly harmful effects of mass incarceration on our communities, which scars both individuals, physically, mentally, and emotionally, and the neighborhoods they return home to?

This combined pandemic and historic movement for justice and equity will prove to be a hard acid test of our systems, structures, and communities.

Radically addressing these issues head-on will position us to respond to the social changes ahead.

I am confident in the ability of the representatives of Ohio to work together with each other and with the constituents they faithfully serve to meet these challenges head on, so that we may have liberty, justice, and equity for all in our great state.

Thank you,

Cir L'Bert, Jr.

Commissioner - Unitarian Universalist Association

President-Elect - The Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron