

Chairman Burke, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on SCR 14. I want to thank Senator Williams and Senator Craig for their introduction of this long-overdue resolution that would declare Racism a Public Health Crisis in Ohio. I am so grateful for you taking the initiative to put our great state on the forefront of this much-needed reform, hopefully, other states will follow by your example and learn from your courage and empathy.

My name is Lindsay Davis, I am a former Miss Ohio who helped introduce "Lindsay's Law" in Ohio that protects student-athletes against sudden cardiac arrest and I regularly work with hospitals, organizations and publications focused on cardiac causes.

I have spent virtually all my adult life involved with healthcare - at first as a patient who benefited from the extraordinary healthcare our state has to offer. Then by working as an advocate for other patients that may not have benefited, as I have, from a privilege that has nothing to do with me and who I am, and unfortunately, everything to do with the color of my skin.

I've always been alarmed by the higher rates of stroke and heart disease in African Americans and have fought for more funding in research at federal and state levels. Heart disease and stroke are the leading causes of death for communities of color, particularly African Americans who have the lowest life expectancy of all racial/ethnic groups living in the United States.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 epidemic, I was appalled at the data showing inequities in care and mortality for black and brown patients. I've seen maps across the country of neighborhoods with concentrated cases and higher death rates. These neighborhoods correspond with higher populations of minorities. Predominantly black counties are seeing three times the rate of infection and six times the rate of COVID-related death as white counties.

Lack of access to healthy food, housing security, quality schools, and green space has contributed to already disproportionate stroke and heart disease rates. Chronic stress from discrimination can also trigger adverse consequences, which can prompt a number of issues with blood pressure, heart disease, and premature aging. Research has shown black mothers who suffer racism have significantly higher maternal and infant mortality rates. Notably, Erica Garner, Eric Garner's daughter went into cardiac arrest following an asthma attack at age 27.

This is obviously not just an issue of health care; this is a systemic problem that permeates every sector and every dark corner of the country...and it's not getting better.

Ohioans - Americans cannot be silent about this.

The wonderful thing about this country and our government is we can use our voices to truly effect change. This change we are speaking of today is critical, and I know I speak for millions of Ohioans when I say, "Everybody counts, or nobody counts." We as a society, as a government, and as decent moral human beings have to say enough! The time is now.

I'd like to quote 2 famous Ohioans that I think really encapsulate what you're trying to do - and how I know that this is our moment to do what's right - and together we can deliver the necessary change.

"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time" - Thomas Edison.

“People will hate you, rate you, shake you, and break you, but how strong you stand is what makes you.” - LeBron James.

I know this resolution, while needed, may be met with resistance, and I know that you have the courage of your convictions to see this through until every child and adult in this state has equal opportunities and isn't burdened with unacceptable disparities in living a healthy life.

I am so grateful for you introducing this legislation to bring to light the issues our minority communities are facing, and I know that your work will be instrumental in bringing people together, educating, and working to improve conditions. Everyone deserves the chance to breathe. We as Ohioans can lead this fight, can forge this path, and can cause this change.

Thank you again for the chance to support Senate Concurrent Resolution 14. I will now answer any questions the committee may have.