

Witness Written Testimony

Thank you Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health Human Services and Medicaid Committee. I am in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14) declaring racism is a public health crisis. A public health crisis is a problem that affects societies' well-being, the educational system, the economy and loss of lives. Similar to many public health crises, racism is complex and connected to different components of our lives. I'm a youth specialist in the mental health sector, an educator in the education field, a political liaison for North East Ohio Young Black Democrats, but most importantly I'm a member of a community that is directly impacted by racism every day. I am a black person who like other minorities have experienced racial profiling, macro-aggressions, micro-aggressions, educational disparities, and work place discrimination. I would like to share a few statistics to illustrate the impact of racism. On average a white family has 20 times the average wealth of a black family. Predominately white school districts receive \$23 billion more than non-predominately white school districts in the states and local funding which was reported in 2016. It was reported in 2017, that the homicide rate for black Americans in all 50 states is on average eight times more than that of whites. I mentioned these statistics because these are usually the statistics we receive during my job training when we prepare to work with children from under-resourced communities.

As a black young woman, I have gone from attending predominantly black schools that have bars on the windows, metal detectors, and no school books to attending culturally diverse schools with olympic size pools, beautiful campuses, and personal computers for every student. I am from a family and a community that has dealt with the criminal justice system and gun violence too often. All of these unfortunate factors have shaped my character. One of the stories that I experienced involved racial profiling by the police. As a teenager who worked a job at the movie theater, I decided to go to the store prior to working an eight hour shift. After leaving Walmart to walk back to my job, a police car began to approach me at the sidewalk. A white male police officer exited the car and approached me to explain that he caught me stealing on camera. I explained to him that "I did not steal anything, I cannot possibly be on camera stealing anything." He insisted that he saw me steal an item, so I began to ask him "if I could see this on camera or if he could just check my bag to see that I'm telling the truth." I did not understand what happened and I was afraid of being arrested. The police began to start raising his voice and accused me of being a "liar" and telling me "I needed to confess to the crime". Eventually we began to get into a verbal dispute where I accused him of being racist and he began to get offended and started yelling at me to "stop using the race card". The officer ended the dispute by stating "if you want to live as a liar and a thief that's your choice" and went back to his police cruiser. I immediately broke down into tears and used my phone to call my family and report the incident. Later that day the police station admitted to my mother that the security guard at

Walmart witnessed a random black girl stealing and the officer wrongfully identified me as the suspect. On that fateful day, I decided to dedicate my life's mission towards fighting social injustice.

As an educator and a mental health official, I work with children from under-resourced communities and disadvantaged circumstances. Unfortunately I have witnessed teachers and other officials say racially insensitive statements to children and treat them as if their lives are irrelevant. I've witnessed teachers express their annoyance with teaching black students or supposedly "urban children". I've heard from too many of my students and clients that "fighting racism is pointless because it's not going to change." Similar to these children, I grew up with a resentful attitude towards the system. I am here today to advocate for those young voices and their futures and I would like to show them that change is possible no matter the size of the issues. Considering the amount of impact that racism has had on history we cannot as a society expect time to sort out this crisis. Racism requires solutions in the form of educational initiatives, policy reforms, transparency with the public, and the reformation of different institutions. To conclude, my hope is that the Senate will take my testimony along with other witnesses' testimonies into serious consideration when considering the passage of this bill. I would like to thank the Ohio Senate Health Committee and the sponsors of the resolution, Senator Williams and Senator Craig. I am open for questions.