

Written Proponent Testimony
Ohio Senate Concurrent Resolution 14
Mara Mason, resident of Columbus

Chair Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, thank you for this opportunity to give testimony for, and to express relentless support for Resolution 14 and the voices, lives, and communities of color in Ohio.

I wholeheartedly support the ask of establishing a working group in Ohio to fight racism, reviewing all portions of the Ohio Revised code with a racial equity lens, and ask for your commitment to use your privilege as legislators to view your own processes with a racial equity lens as well.

I have lived in Columbus for 5 years. I have lived in privilege in Ohio for 23. While I have never been the victim of racism, I was shaped by institutions that were built for people who look like me. I was created in privilege and in unconscious bias.

I grew up in a small suburb, where my school was almost exclusively white. In class, I learned about Independence Day, but I wasn't taught to celebrate Juneteenth, and Maya Angelou's words were tucked away in a closed book. Shamefully it wasn't until I attended Ohio State that I recognized that my schooling had silenced black voices all along. In my sixteen years of public education, I have never had a black teacher or professor. This is my personal experience, but demonstrates only one of the institutions deeply rooted in systemic racism in Ohio.

The state of our nation has already alerted you to the levity of this situation. Racism is a public health crisis as clearly detailed by this resolution. From birth (line 44) to death (line 64) and gone too soon (line 67), black lives are consistently treated with inequity and disregard in our country, and therefore in our Buckeye state. It loudly raises the question of how many black lives have to be taken by systemic injustice, hate, and police brutality for it to be too many? How many seconds kneeling on a man's neck is too many? The answer should always be *one*. One is too many. While our nation grieves the brutal murder of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many others for one human breath, the state of Ohio remembers the lives that were taken in our own backyard. Black Ohioans are disproportionately affected by police brutality, as stated in line 70 of Resolution 14. When pulled over, Timothy Russel and Malissa Williams were shot by Cleveland police 137 times. Their killers walk free. Tamir Rice was twelve years old when he was murdered. We remember the black men and women who were murdered here in Columbus, at the hands of the Columbus Police Department. The same officers I would call if I were in a car accident stole Jaron Thomas and Chris Wade from their families. They killed Tyre King, who was 13 years old, and Henry Green, who was 23. I can never understand what it is like to be black in America, or in Ohio. I ask for you to recognize that many of you cannot either.

I ask the committee to briefly recall why you decided to run for office. Your constituents voted for you in the hopes that you would help them. In a few years, I hope to sit on your side of the table, and it would be hypocritical of me to raise my right hand and take any oath to level the scales of injustice if I stayed silent in this moment. Meanwhile black men and women are being murdered by police officers in Ohio. This happens while their life expectancy is four years lower than the average Ohioan as shown in line 68, while the school to prison pipeline fills Ohio juvenile prisons unjustly with 56% black children as stated in line 55, and while the poverty rate and wealth disparity in Ohio,

as mentioned in line 59, keep black children from being able to access school systems like the one that I attended. So that they can go to colleges like Ohio State, and they can grow up to live the life promised to them by the US Constitution. So that they can vote, so that they can run for office, and so that they may vow to protect their communities just as you have. Remember that you earned your seat at this table. Your job is a privilege, but life is a constitutional right. And until black lives are protected and treated equally to mine, and my white or white-passing allies', we will be in a public health crisis in Ohio. Simply put, the core of public health begins with life itself.

I am speaking as a white woman of deep privilege to stand in support of this resolution. Racism is a public health crisis in Ohio, and Black Lives Matter. I respectfully demand the committee approves of and moves SCR 14 to the Ohio Senate floor for a vote. I am asking that you protect the constitutional right to life for black Ohioans, just as you have protected mine for 23 years.

A great thank you to the committee for allowing me the opportunity to give testimony on this resolution.