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Chairman Burke, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, members of the Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for SCR 14 to declare racism a public health crisis in the state of Ohio. On behalf of the board of health and staff, Franklin County Public Health strongly supports this resolution as an acknowledgment and commitment to address the underlying conditions and causes of our state's significant health disparities.

"The racial differences that we measure are the consequence of the centuries of policies, practices, and systems that have intentionally provided advantage to some while, simultaneously, intentionally subjecting others to disadvantage." These are the words of Dr. Arthur James, national expert in maternal and infant health and member of the Franklin County Board of Health. It's what summarized the views of the board when it formally declared racism a public health crisis May 12, 2020- the first local health department in Ohio to make such a declaration. Since that time, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners, City of Columbus, Columbus Public Health and the Cleveland City Council have now made similar declarations- with many more considering the same. Our declaration was the culmination of a process and journey the health department has been on for several years.

In 2018, Franklin County Public Health worked with dozens of partners across the community to develop a community health improvement plan rooted in the premise that social determinants of health and health equity should be the foundation as our community works to address health priorities such as chronic disease, mental health and addiction, access to care and maternal and infant health. In 2019, as part of its strategic plan, Franklin County Public Health identified equity as our "north star." The idea of proportionate universalism where our resources are commensurate with the need of the community and that we incorporate equity into all our programs and services. In October of 2019, as we celebrated our agency's centennial on the Senate floor, Senator Hearcel Craig spoke to the importance of public health and how it's critical we address the root causes of our health outcomes. Franklin County Public Health was honored to accept that recognition on behalf of all local health departments working to do just that.

In late 2019, Franklin County Public Health attended a national summit that commemorated 400 years since Africans in bondage were sold into slavery here in British North America. We were reminded at the summit that after slavery ended in 1865 with the adoption of the 13th Amendment, the mistreatment of African Americans was codified in local, state, and federal laws, policies, and practices designed to accommodate Jim Crow, which spread this ideology throughout the entire country. As noted by the summit organizers "today, circumstances in America remain unfair for African Americans, as seen in racial disparities in health, economic security, housing, the justice system, and beyond." Franklin County Public Health agrees that these inequities have led to the

racial disparities we see today. We must now continue to enhance our understanding of the relationship between past and present and take action toward an equitable future.

This is why the board of health adopted its declaration. To take action. The health department has identified 16 next steps as part of its declaration. We will be measured not on the declaration itself, but on the actions that follow. This declaration is the beginning of a process. A conversation. An acknowledgement of the failures of the past and a commitment to doing what's right moving forward. With this declaration, the board commits to the following:

- Create an equity and justice-oriented organization, by identifying specific activities, policies and procedures to embrace diversity and to incorporate antiracism principles across the agency, leadership, staffing and contracting. This will include a plan to understand, address and dismantle racism, in order to undo how racism affects individual and population health and provide tools to engage actively and authentically with communities of color.
- Advocate for relevant policies that improve health in communities of color, and supports local, state, regional, and federal initiatives that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism.
- Work to build alliances and partnerships with other organizations that are confronting racism and encourages other local, state, regional and national entities to recognize racism as a public health crisis.

Franklin County Public Health acknowledges the sponsors of this resolution for their vision and particularly thanks Senators Craig and Maharath who serve on this committee and represent the residents of our health jurisdiction. As we continue our response to the COVID-19 pandemic it's unmistakable those who are suffering disproportionately are communities of color. This is a time for action and progress. Respectfully, we urge this committee, charged with legislation affecting the health of our residents, to take this opportunity and send a bold message that all residents deserve an equitable chance to achieve their optimal health. This resolution is our next step to achieving that goal.

Sincerely,



Joe Mazzola, MPA
Health Commissione

