

Attn: Chairman Burke
Ohio Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee
Re: S. C. R. No. 14

June 8, 2020

Good afternoon, Chair Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Antonio, and the members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee. My name is Zachery McCune and I am the Advocacy Manager at Equitas Health. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my written testimony in support of S.C.R. No. 14, which declares racism a public health crisis. Black Ohioans experience higher mortality rates from heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes, higher rates of maternal morbidity and infant mortality, higher rates of poverty, and higher rates of incarceration, and higher rates of state violence. The current global pandemic and the ongoing acts of police brutality against Black bodies have exacerbated these disparities, and we at Equitas Health believe it is time the state declare racism a public health crisis and address the root cause of these disparities.

Equitas Health is a nonprofit, community-based health care organization that serves patients throughout Ohio and in neighboring states through a diverse set of services, including primary and specialized medical care, behavioral health care, dental care, pharmacy, HIV/STI prevention, case management, and advocacy. We are a Federally Qualified Health Center and the largest Ryan White Program provider in the state. We operate four health centers and pharmacies in Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati. Our mission is to be the gateway to good health for those at risk of or affected by HIV/AIDS, for the LGBTQ+ community, and for those seeking a welcoming health care home. Equitas Health recognizes the malignant expression of racism embedded in our nation's institutions.

We recognize that racism affects all of our systems, including healthcare, housing, employment, finance, education, politics, and environmental protection. The conditions created by institutional racism combined with the inadequate response to the COVID-19 pandemic have made Black communities disproportionately vulnerable to COVID-19 transmissions, complications, and deaths. We call this out as abhorrent and unacceptable and ask that the state take action to address the root causes that have created these disparities for Black Ohioans.

S.C.R. 14 is a necessary measure to address the public health crisis that is systemic racism. The resolution creates a dedicated workgroup that will create a publicly accessible glossary of terms and definitions concerning racism and health equity. This action provides policy makers and advocates an appropriate and racially competent framework – this is a necessary measure to establish mutual understanding and promote health equity. The resolution also promotes racially equitable hiring and promotion of all employees including state employees; it provides training to all elected officials, staff, funders, and grantees on workplace biases and how to mitigate them; it also promotes and encourages policies that prioritize the health of people of color. The items contained within the resolution are actionable and measurable—by passing S.C.R 14 and declaring racism a public health crisis Ohio will be taking an active approach to dismantling institutional racism and creating a healthier and more equitable state.

In conclusion, S.C.R 14 declares racism a public health crisis and establishes specific strategies to begin dismantling it. I strongly support S.C.R. 14 and ask that members of this committee also offer their support by advancing this resolution and declaring what we know to be true – that racism is an insidious condition that compromises the health and safety of Black Ohioans. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding my support of S.C.R. 14 on behalf of Equitas Health.

In solidarity and pursuit of justice,
Zachery McCune
Advocacy Manager, Equitas Health
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