

Thank you Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee. My name is Christine Miguel and I'm here to testify in support of the Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14) declaring that racism is a public health crisis.

As a future physician and Black woman, I have both witnessed and experienced first hand the deleterious role that racism can play in health outcomes and in perpetuating health disparities and inequity. Let me be very clear: racism, not race, is a risk factor and incites a sequela of mostly preventable disease and premature death, and is therefore a public health crisis. Though the examples are numerous, as an aspiring OBGYN, let me be explicit about the glaring disparities in maternal and infant mortality unique to Black mothers and babies.

As it stands, Black women are 3-4 times more likely to die from complications related to pregnancy than their white counterparts. This is a tragedy and it does not exist in a bubble. As it stands, Black infants are 2.3 times more likely to die before their first birthday. This is a reality all too close to home for myself and many of my loved ones. While you may have heard of these statistics in passing or as a flashy but transient headline, these are the fears that keep Black parents and their families up at night and quite frankly, fearful of an often malignant healthcare system. Naively, I used to feel impervious to untimely death until I realized that I, too, want the experience of childbirth one day.

You might be tempted to attribute these differences to class or education. That would be a grave misrepresentation of the issue at hand. You might be tempted to associate these deaths with the natural course of a patient's chronic disease. That would be a willful false equivalence. Studies show that irrespective of education or income level, black mothers are dying from trying to bring flesh to life. The interrogation of this pervasive health issue must begin from the top-down, and so here I am pleading with you. Please, we cannot abandon our mothers and babies any longer. We cannot deem their lives disposable and their deaths unaccountable. We cannot continue to create death certificates before one's first breath of life can be remembered.

I implore you to hear and act on our outcries. To be frank, my life depends on it.

I would like to thank the committee and the sponsors of this resolution, Sen. Sandra Williams and Sen. Hearcel Craig.