

June 8, 2020

Greetings Honorable Members of the Ohio Senate

My name is Zakiya Miller, a resident of 4414 Euclid Avenue, Youngstown, OH 44512. I am a graduate of Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. I am writing to support the SCR 14 resolution to establish Racism as a Public Health Crisis in Ohio. Racism, as defined by the Critical Race Theory presented through Dismantling Racism.org, “involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices.”¹ A concept that is at the very core of Public Health is that of Social Determinants of Health. These are “economic and social conditions that influence individual and group differences in health status.” They include (1) Economic Stability, (2) Education, (3) Health and Health Care, (4) Neighborhood and Built Environment, and (5) Social and Community Context.² Now allow me to illustrate how these determinants interact in a more tangible manner.

Imagine a child born in Youngstown which is the city with the highest percent of child poverty in Ohio, according to the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. Despite the odds this child was able to be part of the 13.5% in the city that finished high school and obtain a Bachelor’s degree.³ Unlike many of his colleagues he did not succumb to being part of the 4.1% of Ohioans who are unemployed.⁴ He was able to get a decent paying job that provided health insurance so he is not part of the 3 million Ohioans served by the Medicaid system.⁵ He is also part of the 68.2% of Ohioans that currently own a home.⁶ He lives in a fairly nice neighborhood. There is a great school in the area. Lots of green space for children to grow and play. Neighbors smile and speak as they walk by. It appears that this child has grown into a man with his own earned piece of the American pie.

Then one day that’s not any different than any other day, he’s coming home from work and preparing to turn into his neighborhood when he is stopped by police. He somehow fits the perfect description of a suspect they are looking for in the area. One thing leads to another and just like that he either becomes 1 of the 17,126 inmates incarcerated in Ohio⁷, or he becomes 1 of the 463 Americans killed by police this year as of June 7, 2020.⁸

Now although throughout this entire illustration I did not mention the race of this individual, I’m willing to bet that the majority of people reading this statement had a clear vision of an African American male in their minds by the time they got to the last sentence. This is simply not due to any implicit biases one may or may not have. This is because if I took these general statistics and controlled them by race you could see that minorities, African Americans in particular, are disproportionately affected. Based on data reported on the State of Ohio Development page, African Americans made up 14.3% of the Ohio population in 2018.⁹ Yet they account for nearly 47% of those currently incarcerated in Ohio.⁷ The median household income for an African American family is approximately \$33,590 compared to \$56,000 for the general Ohio population. The unemployment rate is higher at 9.5%⁹ and inadequate access to quality healthcare is evident in the negative outcomes related to this year’s Novel Coronavirus Pandemic. It is currently estimated that 26% of positive COVID 19 cases and 17% of deaths in Ohio are African Americans.¹⁰ Then there is of course the disproportionate amount of black people being beat up and/or killed by police. Since 2015 there has been a death rate of 30.3% of African Americans compared

to 10.7% of white Americans killed by police nationwide.⁸ As many take to the streets in protests during these uncertain times African Americans are left to ponder which fight is most important. Justice or Health? Both of which could have life or death consequences.

All of these figures represent Social Determinants of Health that affect the overall well being of any State or Nation. By not considering these factors as they relate to race you are producing an economy that will not have a completely viable workforce, a healthcare system that will be overstrained and overworked, a prison system that will be oversaturated, and an overall negative morale that will lead to the detriment of society. This is why Racism is absolutely a Public Health Crisis and should have the necessary funding and resources allocated to address it. I truly hope that you consider and put into practice the provisions outlined in the SCR 14 Resolution.

Sincerely

Zakiya N. Miller
Ohio Resident

References

- 1 <https://www.dismantlingracism.org/racism-defined.html>
- 2 Braveman, P. and Gottlieb, L., 2014. The social determinants of health: it's time to consider the causes of the causes. Public health reports, 129(1_suppl2), pp.19-31.
- 3 <https://www.cleveland.com/datacentral/2020/01/every-ohio-city-and-county-ranked-for-poverty-child-poverty-census-estimates.html>
- 4 <https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.oh.htm>
- 5 <https://medicaid.ohio.gov/Portals/0/Resources/Reports/Annual/ODM-Annual-Report-SFY19.pdf>
- 6 <https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/data/ann19ind.html>
- 7 <https://drc.ohio.gov/Portals/0/Annual%20report%20final%20ODRC.pdf>
- 8 https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/protests-spread-over-police-shootings-police-promised-reforms-every-year-they-still-shoot-nearly-1000-people/2020/06/08/5c204f0c-a67c-11ea-b473-04905b1af82b_story.html
- 9 <https://www.development.ohio.gov/files/research/P7003.pdf>
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