

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

My name is Toren Moore, I was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio and I am currently a third-year medical student at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. I have identified many things that prove racism is a public health crisis, but I want to draw your attention to how systemic racism and civil unrest has silenced some of the most powerful voices in the African American community.

If you are unaware, there is an admissions test to be accepted into medical school. Once in medical school, there are a series of exams for students until they earn their license. Unfortunately, the number of African American men that become licensed physicians is entirely too low. I would like to take this opportunity to share my personal experiences and address how the combination of systemic racism, civil unrest, and disproportionate demographics in medicine, adds to the public health crisis that plagues our nation.

I graduated from the University of Mount Union in 2016, with the goal of beginning medical school in the fall of 2017. During the summer of 2016, I worked full time during the day and studied for my Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) in the evenings. On July 5th and July 6th, 2016, Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, respectfully, were wrongfully killed while in police custody. America turned to protests and communities needed to be healed. I was told by my parents, by my advisers, and other mentors that I am not to go protest, I was to keep my head in my books and study, so that I could become a doctor and impact “real change”.

Now, 4 years later, numerous innocent civilians are dying at the hands of law enforcement. George Floyd protests are happening all over the world, but once again, I am told to keep my head down and study for my United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) Step 1 exam. I am told that once I become a physician, I will have more power to initiate real change.

So, four years have passed, and I am still receiving the same message. Ignore systemic racism, ignore the injustices, ignore everything that is going on and maybe in the future, my voice will be heard. My mentors and parents are trying to protect me, but what I hear is “keep studying, your voice holds no value yet”.

So I thank you for listening to my concerns, thank you for giving my voice value. With your attention, I would like to explain how this adds to the public health crisis.

As an African American male, I am part of a select minority in the medical field. I have been given the opportunity to impact change, but I must do so in fear. I am afraid to leave my house during civil unrest because of the rampant racism. I fear that I could be arrested without justifiable cause, that arrest could end in my death. I am afraid to voice my opinion and protest because it could end my life. Civil unrest puts everyone’s life in danger, more so for African American men, and even more so for black men pursuing medicine. Ohio State University will graduate 5 African American men in 2022. FIVE. If one of us were to get arrested for peaceful protest, not only are our medical careers at risk, the future health of the African American community is negatively impacted as well. The Columbus African American community, who is already struggling for adequate healthcare, could lose 20% of their physicians, this public health crisis is self-fulfilling.

Systemic racism has infiltrated medical education and paradoxically stifled the voices of black leaders. In 2015, only 5.7% of graduating physicians were African American; less than half of those were men. Advisers and those who have our best interest at heart are telling us to quiet our voices, do not speak out, do not represent your communities. This is explicit stifling of my voice.

Society is telling us do not go outside and protest because we could be seriously injured or arrested without justifiable cause. This is implicit stifling of my voice. Racism is a public health crisis because there are not enough African American doctors. This fact has led to disproportionate health outcomes for the African American population. This fact has allowed universities and society to place the few African Americans who do pursue medicine on a pedestal, hidden away behind a giant curtain.

Again, I thank the committee for their time and for their bravery to move forward on this critical issue. I would also like to thank Sen. Sandra Williams and Sen. Hearcel Craig for sponsoring this resolution. My goal was to convey the internal conflict that plagues African American medical students daily; do I sit here with a distracted mind and study? Or do I speak out for what I believe in? I sat and studied in 2016. Now, in 2020 I write to you so when future African American students are studying for medical exams, they do not feel silenced.

I will no longer be silent. I will no longer “keep my head down”. I am no longer waiting until I am a resident, or a fellow, or an attending to voice my opinion.