



Re. Proponent testimony for Senate Concurrent Resolution 14
To: Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee
From: Colleen Dempsey, LISW-W, Practice Associate

June 9, 2020

Good morning Chair Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and the rest of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this morning on Resolution 14 which would acknowledge racism as the public health crisis it is and encourage the establishment of a working group to address racial disparities.

My name is Colleen Dempsey. I am a Licensed Independent Social Worker and the Practice Associate for the Ohio Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. My testimony will be brief, as the resolution itself shares enough compelling evidence that racism is a shameful public health crisis 400 years in development and that it is the responsibility of this General Assembly to address.

The recent victims of racist police violence, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade have provoked a fire that has been burning for years. They are only three names in a long, tragic list including in Ohio: Tamir Rice, Henry Green, Ty're King, John Crawford III and many more. As we speak, the public, including many social workers is clearly and loudly declaring their grief and outrage over racism and the use of force in policing. I cannot put it better than these brave, grieving people. I can only encourage the committee to listen and take them seriously.

Police violence is only one manifestation of racism as a public health crisis. Underlying these gruesome, widely shared videos are centuries of public policy that have created racial disparities either intentionally or by neglect in health care, housing, human services and on. Social workers see these impacts in every facet of health and human services where we work; as the predominate providers of behavioral healthcare in the state, in child and adult protection, doctor's office and hospitals, schools, prisons and nursing homes. In each of these areas of practice, racial disparities in outcomes are common, not because of factors internal to Black people and other people of color, but because of racism in the environment.

Social workers specialize in treating the person or people within the environment; recognizing that an individual's condition cannot be understood by internal factors alone but is often better explained by external factors like racism. These external factors are sometimes known as social determinants of health and they create barriers to wellness. Social workers often focus on these determinants including access to transportation and high-quality work, safe environments, healthy food, and stable housing each of which is influenced by historical and present-day racism as it manifests in public policy and funding. Most notably is the racist housing policy redlining which was designed to limit the prosperity of

Black communities, along with immigrant communities and other communities of color. Many of the recognized public health crises of today (infant mortality, addiction, etc.) when mapped out to target hot spot areas, would overlay almost perfectly with the historical redlining maps.

Social workers work every day to support the health and wellness of all Ohioans, but our efforts are hampered by the lack of acknowledgment and proactive policy that would address the real, historical roots of these issues, including racism. Despite the incredible civil rights victories of the 1960s, won through protest and public outrage, the more subtle forms of racism in the United States have never been adequately acknowledged or addressed. Resolution 14 would take an important step forward in acknowledging and ending the harm done to Black communities and other communities of color.

Thank you for your time today and I am happy to take any questions.