



June 9, 2020

Ohio Senate Health, Human Service & Medicaid Committee

Re: ONA Support for SCR 14

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee. My name is Carol Roe, First Vice President of the Ohio Nurses Association. In addition to being a nurse, I am a licensed attorney and former Mayor of the city of Cleveland Heights. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SCR 14, a resolution aimed to declare racism a public health crisis and to ask the Governor to establish a working group to promote racial equity in Ohio. As the Governor has pointed out, the current pandemic has accentuated the disparities based on race as well as persistent underfunding of public health programs.

The Ohio Nurses Association (ONA) is the recognized leader and advocate for professional nurses and nursing in Ohio. Established in 1904, ONA was founded on the principles of protecting, promoting and advancing the profession of nursing. As an association of nearly 10,000 nurses, ONA strives to improve the health and wellbeing of all Ohio's citizens and we believe SCR 14 provides an opportunity to shed light on the inequities within Ohio's healthcare system, with the intent to achieve the best health outcomes for *all* Ohioans.

Every two years our association's delegates come together to discuss the priorities for the profession of nursing, as well as how we would like to spend our time advocating at Ohio's Statehouse. It is through the work of ONA's membership that a legislative platform is created and approved at our biannual Convention. Through the lens of this guiding document, ONA's health policy work is prioritized, strategized, and implemented. As a part of ONA's approved legislative platform, our membership has made it abundantly clear that we advocate for improvement of health standards and the availability of health care services for all people that includes basic human rights to equity under the law, as these rights are affected within the health care delivery system. Additionally, ONA supports state policies and programs that meet fundamental needs of individuals, families, and groups, particularly with respect to health care. All of our association's work shall be unrestricted by considerations of nationality, race, religion, creed, lifestyle, color, gender, disability, sexual orientation, health status, age and all protected classes.

The nursing profession is driven to protect and advocate for patients. It is that drive which has led to our national association, the American Nurses Association, to advocate nursing's agenda for health care reform for more than two decades. That agenda employs the overarching principles of access, quality of care, cost of care and health care work force. SRC 14 is certainly consistent with that agenda.

The ethics of caring, as expressed in our code of ethics, drive the practice of nursing, guiding nurses to practice with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth and unique attributes of every person. Race, background, or gender does not define the worth of a person. Every day, nurses provide care to everyone in need, without judgment or hesitation. Care without discrimination isn't just the right thing to do; it is what all humans deserve. From early on in our nursing school education, we are educated on the differences between inequality, equality,



equity, and justice. We all know that inequality, by definition, is unequal access to opportunities. Equality is evenly distributed tools and assistance. Equity is customizing tools that identify and address inequality. We cannot provide the same tools and assistance for everyone to address systemic racism and the health inequities in our state. Instead, we must address the underlying root cause and customize the tools we have at our disposal to meet our citizens' health care needs and address the health disparities for *all* Ohioans. Justice is fixing the system to offer equal access to both tools and opportunities. ONA supports efforts that achieve both health equity and justice and we believe SCR 14 is a step in the right direction to meet those goals. If we can stand together to identify all health disparity gaps within our state, we believe we can achieve true equity that allows all Ohioans to reach their full health potential.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer support for SCR 14. Ohio's nurses look forward to offering our expertise to help recognize problems within our state's healthcare system and identify solutions that improve healthcare outcomes and achieve true healthcare justice. I would be happy to address any questions you may have at this time.

Sincerely,

Carol Roe, RN, MSN, JD