



National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

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Proponent Testimony on SCR No 14
Brandi Slaughter on Behalf of the Columbus NAACP
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Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, I bring you greetings from the oldest and boldest civil rights organization, your Columbus NAACP. I am Brandi Slaughter, Assistant Secretary for Unit 3177 and Chair of the Political Action Committee. On behalf of the unit, I am thrilled to support our Senator Craig and Senator Williams in calling for racism to be recognized as a public health crisis.

For more than a century, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has worked to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination. Inspired by the force and commitment of The Call of 1909, which denounced the growing oppression of people of color and mobilized thousands to work to bring this discrimination to an end, today, the NAACP seeks to prioritize this work through NAACP game changers that address the major areas of inequality facing African Americans: economic sustainability, education, health, public safety and criminal justice, voting rights and political representation and expanding youth and young adult engagement. In 2019, the NAACP passed a resolution to treat violence as a public health crisis.

In this time of grieving and anguish, I struggled in writing this testimony. In times of crisis and conflict, I draw on my faith. The last time I mounted a pulpit, it was to preach on one of the last words of Jesus. It is these last words that allow us to appreciate the depth of His sacrifice for the Christian's salvation. Today, I want to turn to George Floyd's last words. It is these last words that give me the courage to speak uncomfortable truths today. Racism is alive and well and literally killing black people.

"It's my face man
I didn't do nothing serious man
please
please
please I can't breathe
please man
please somebody
please man
I can't breathe
I can't breathe
Please

(Inaudible)
man can't breathe, my face
just get up
I can't breathe
please (inaudible)
I can't breathe sh*t
I will
I can't move
mama
mama
I can't
my knee
my nuts
I'm through
I'm through
I'm claustrophobic
my stomach hurt
my neck hurts
everything hurts
some water or something
please
please
I can't breathe officer
don't kill me
they gon' kill me man
come on man
I cannot breathe
I cannot breathe
they gon' kill me
they gon' kill me
I can't breathe
I can't breathe
please sir
please
please
please I can't breathe"

Then his eyes shut and the pleas stop. George Floyd was pronounced dead shortly after.

We find ourselves in a perfect storm. Police violence, adverse socioeconomic conditions and a global public health crisis which has laid bare the disparities and systemic racism. According to mappingpoliceviolence.com, the rate that police kill black people in Columbus is 91.9%, Cincinnati 52.9% and Cleveland 28.8%. All three cities in the top ten, ahead of New York City. Ohio has a problem- a problem that will not go away by simply ignoring it. We must leave denial Ohio. Advancing this resolution is just the start and an important step to recognizing the reality of being Black in Ohio and in the country.

I have personally had negative interactions with the police. You'd be hard pressed to find a person of color that has not been racially profiled. The most recent interaction was a bogus traffic stop. A while ago, I was heading home late at night from the laundry mat from doing laundry as my washer had broken. A police officer pulled me over saying that my light was out over my license plate. When I asserted to the officer that my light wasn't out, I was arrested, handcuffed, and placed in the back of a cop car. He asked me over and over again whether he would find drugs in my car. As I sat there, my prayer was Lord just help me to make it home to my baby, my son Nicholas. These instances stay with you. I'm thank God that I am alive to tell you the story today.

As you know, the coronavirus outbreak is officially a pandemic, according to the World Health Organization. Because of the racial and economic inequities embedded in our country's systems, the effects of the coronavirus are compounded for black and brown communities. Black people are dying at about three times the rate of white people from COVID-19. The lack of access to care, information, and pre-existing conditions all contribute to rising deaths in the Black community. Black people also make up those who bear other disproportionate negative impacts: lower life expectancy, a higher likelihood of death by heart disease or stroke, and a higher infant mortality rate, among other issues. We live in a state rich in quality hospitals and health systems, yet the data show us that blacks have poorer health outcomes.

A more just society; it is possible. My question to you is what are you willing to do for it. Please support this resolution. Don't let it die in committee. Because people of color can't breathe. We can't breathe. We can't breathe because for years the legislature has supported policies that disadvantage minorities. My stomach hurts, my neck hurts everything hurts.... Racism obstructs equitable access to health care, quality educational experiences, and safe and affordable housing. Many policies advanced by this body have been a proverbial knee on the black community's neck. Can we have some water or something.... Please give us relief by adopting policies that increase access to childcare, healthcare and humane, sanitary living conditions to at-risk, vulnerable populations. This resolution is a first step, a necessary step for the work that is ahead to ensure a more equitable Ohio.

This is more than a moment. Now is the time for courage. We have an opportunity to stand in such a time as this. Don't shoot the messenger and I mean that literally. The status quo endures because of racism and has no future to be morally decent unless racist roots are torn out. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said "The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people." I worked with many of you over the years, I view you as good people. Hear my passionate plea, please support this important resolution. I am open to any questions you may have.