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Ohio Senate
15th Senate District



Sandra Williams

Ohio Senate
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Senate Concurrent Resolution 14
Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee
Chairman Burke
Sponsor Testimony – Senator Hearcel F. Craig and Senator Sandra Williams
June 9, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee for the opportunity to bring before you Senate Concurrent Resolution 14. Today is an opportunity for us to discuss an issue that is at the forefront of minds across America and throughout the world-- that is the issue of racism. Racism is not new, it has been in existence for over 400 years when Africans were kidnapped from their villages, placed on cargo ships, and brought to the New World, which we now know as America.

Our constitution provides certain protections to every American- even if you are suspected of committing a crime. People across America, and the world, are protesting because Timothy Russel, Melissa Williams, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and countless others have been killed at the hands of law enforcement and were never given their day in court.

The problems we are facing today are not just black problems or just white problems, they are America's problems. I am well aware that the state legislature cannot legislate morality but we can put in place policies that provide recourse for the wrongs that are playing out in our state and our country. By passing this resolution we will be sending a strong message to federal and local officials that racist practices will not be tolerated, Not In My Backyard (NIMBY), Not on my Watch (NOMW), Not In Ohio (NIO).

There have been centuries of legally sanctioned racist laws that were eliminated after passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act; however subtle and indirect policies and practices in political, economic, and societal norms have continued to add to structural racism and therefore widen the gap between the well-being of African Americans and white America.

What follows now is a list of some of the federal policies and practices that have systematically disadvantaged African Americans in this country.

- The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
- The 1862 Homestead Act
- The 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson ruling
- The 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Administration Policy
- The 1935 Social Security Act
- The 1935 National Labor Relations Act
- The 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act
- The 1944 GI Bill
- The 1997 Consent Decree advantaging white farmers over black farmers.¹

The result of past laws, among other things, has resulted in a wealth gap. According to a recent CNN report, white families have substantially more wealth than black families. The median net worth of white households is about 10 times the median net worth of black households: white families net worth is approximately \$171,000, whereas black families' net worth is about \$17,600. White families typically have higher incomes than black families. The median income for black households is a little less than 60% of that of white households. The unemployment rate for black Americans exceeds that of whites. A larger share of black population lives in poverty. The nation's poverty rate of 11.8% in 2018, whereas the poverty rate for black Americans was 20.8%, compared to 8.1% for non-Hispanic whites. According to the Economic Policy Institute, Black workers are 60% more likely to be uninsured than white workers. And most recently Black people make up a larger share of US Covid-19 deaths.²

Our goal in introducing this legislation is to have a conversation that leads to positive systemic change for EVERYONE. I ask that you give the witnesses that come after us and their stories real consideration and take a moment and imagine yourselves in their shoes. Undoing racism is not a quick fix. It is a journey that we must work on every day. It calls for preparation and careful action and we must be prepared to stay the whole course. We cannot be effective going it alone; we must band together to increase awareness, study, learn, discuss, plan, and take action. To be successful we must become part of a movement to change the paradigm of structural racism.

I respectfully ask for your support of SCR 14. Once again, Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to bring SCR 14 before you. We would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have at this time.

¹ <https://www.racialequityinstitute.com/>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/03/politics/black-white-us-financial-inequality/index.html>