

URGENT MESSAGE (RACISM IS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS)

Thank you Chairman Burke, Vice chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid committee. My name is Taborah Zaramo, and I am a second year medical Student at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. I also worked in The US ARMY as an EMT for six years. I am here to testify in support of senate concurrent resolution 14(SCR 14) declaring that racism is a public health crisis.

I have witnessed firsthand racism as a public health crisis on several occasions while working as an EMT, serving a variety of different patient populations in Ohio. One particular event, that broke my heart and highlights the urgency of the SCR14 declaration is detailed below:

We were called to a black elderly man's house to take him to a doctor's appointment. This was not a rare occurrence. When we arrived we found him lying on his bed. He was happy to see us, because he did not know if we were actually going to come. He expressed to me that he broke his femur around 6 months ago and has had a cast on it ever since. He also shared that he was unable to make it to follow up visits, as he did not have reliable transportation. Upon arrival at the hospital we sat in the waiting room for 2 hours before the doctor came in the room, only to tell the nurse to cut off his cast. They then began to cut off the cast causing the patient excruciating pain. The nurse stated the pain was because the cast had fused with the skin due to the extended wear. He begged and pleaded for them to stop or to give him pain medication to help alleviate the pain. They told him "no, he's being dramatic and to be still he just needed to deal with it". Not only was it dreadful to watch, but it was also disheartening to witness the medical providers be unsympathetic of his pain or situation. The team also scorned him for not coming to the follow up appointment earlier. The doctor returned after the cast was removed only to say the cast needs to be put back on because the x-rays came back and his leg did not properly heal and that the patient needs to be more proactive about his health. In this moment, all I could do was apologize to the patient and try to comfort him in his pain. When I first picked up the patient from his house, I knew the health care system had failed him. However, seeing how the care team treated him, disregarded his pain, disrespected the man's time (turning an hour appointment to over 4-hour appointment), I was extremely disappointed.

To witness the health care team treat this patient with no respect, sympathy or care was disgusting. Moreover, I was in shock because I have seen this same team treat white patients with much more respect and kindness. To see a black man treated so unfairly and have the health care system fail him so blatantly was sickening, but I realized this was a bigger issue. What I witnessed was not an isolated event, but proof of a bigger problem that is rooted in the systematic racism that has plagued our country. This story as well as countless others echo the fact that racism has caused black and brown people to have limited access to care and when they finally get access to care statements such as "Black people's nerve endings are less sensitive than white people's."; "Black people's skin is thicker than white people's."; and "Black people's blood coagulates more quickly than white people's." are endorsed (<https://www.pnas.org/content/113/16/4296>). This type of ideology and philosophy is what gets people severely injured, traumatized and killed. We cannot continue to turn a blind eye to these

stories when there is an arsenal of research and statistics pointing to racism and biases that come with.

I want to thank the committee and sponsors of the resolution for taking the time to consider this story. In addition, I want to thank you for the opportunity not only to share my experience, but to finally give this patient a voice for change.

I am open to any further question and inquiry.

-Taborah Zaramo
MD candidate