

Testimony on SCR 14 before the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee  
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Good morning Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee. My name is Lindsey Gopinath, and I am writing in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14) declaring that racism is a public health crisis.

We know that up to 40 percent of health outcomes are influenced by social determinants of health (and that some estimates are even higher). These social determinants – economic stability, housing, education, food security, etcetera – are inextricably linked with race due to systemic racism. Policy Matters Ohio says that poverty rates are 2.6 times higher for Black Ohioans than White Ohioans.<sup>1</sup> Poverty is exacerbated by housing segregation, which leads to segregated schools. High teacher turnover and less experienced teachers in areas of concentrated poverty contribute to poorer educational outcomes, which lead to poor employment and health outcomes later in life. The cycle continues, and the chronic stress that ensues impacts life expectancy and the generations to come.

During my time at Case Western Reserve University’s Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, I had my eyes opened to the rampant racism in our communities (at individual and institutional levels) through courses including Human Development, Health Disparities, Community Trauma and Issues in Health Policy and Service Delivery. I also witnessed the insidious impacts of racism by participating in community-based extracurricular activities in the Fairfax neighborhood and at the local men’s shelter. Residents living in Fairfax cited nutrition and access to healthy foods as a concern. Higher rates of obesity lead to higher rates of chronic conditions. According to Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless, there were about 23,000 people experiencing homelessness in 2018 in Cuyahoga County. Eighty percent of the 7,000 people who entered a shelter for housing were people of color.<sup>3</sup> These snippets just scrape the surface of how racism is affecting the mental, physical and emotional wellbeing of Black Americans. But there is hope.

It is never too late to change. Racism underlies policies related to the social determinants of health. Naming racism as a public health crisis is a necessary first step to bring awareness to these problems. We can work together to address and reimagine unjust policies and implement equitable ones using a racial lens. We must create environments for people to thrive, not simply survive.

Thank you, Senator Craig and Senator Williams, for sponsoring this resolution, to the committee for this opportunity to testify and to all for your attention to these issues.

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<sup>1</sup>Woodrum, A. (2018). Building a healthy Ohio: Overcoming barriers to health stemming from poverty, segregation and racism. Retrieved from [https://www.policymattersohio.org/research-policy/sustainable-communities/health-health-equity/building-a-healthy-ohio#\\_ftn43](https://www.policymattersohio.org/research-policy/sustainable-communities/health-health-equity/building-a-healthy-ohio#_ftn43)

<sup>2</sup>Ohio Department of Education. (2019). School report cards. Retrieved from <https://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/school/detail/013034>

<sup>3</sup>Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless. (2019). 2019 Just the facts: Poverty and homelessness in our community. Retrieved from <https://www.neoch.org/2019-overview-of-the-numbers>