



Ohio Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee

Written Testimony on SCR 14

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Chairman Burke, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on SCR 14. My name is Cheri Walter and I am the CEO of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities. We represent Ohio's Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Boards.

I am writing in support of SCR 14. On June 5th, the OACBHA membership unanimously voted to approve the declaration included on the following page.

OACBHA, and our member Boards stand ready to do the work necessary the follow-through on the action steps outlined below. We will be strengthening our efforts to eradicate racism and continuing our work achieve health equity as we strive to ensure that all Ohioans are able to access and receive high-quality, culturally competent, and inclusive mental health and addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery support services when and where they need them.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Should you have any questions, please contact me at cwalter@oacbha.org.



Declaration Racism is a Public Health Crisis

The members of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities declare that racism is a public health crisis. As a driving force of the social determinants of health, racism causes persistent discrimination influencing many areas of life, including healthcare, housing, education, employment, and criminal justice.

OACBHA strongly condemns the death of George Floyd. This unnecessarily brutal tragedy and others like it demonstrate the impact of racism by individuals in power who abuse their authority.

Communities of color, people of low social economic status, and individuals who have disabilities, are more likely to experience poor health outcomes as a consequence of social determinants of health — health inequities stemming from economic stability, education, physical environment, inadequate food and access to health care systems, including mental health and addiction. The current COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and further exacerbated health inequities.

Trauma is often experienced by racial and ethnic population groups as a result of premature deaths, major assaults on culture, and intergenerational lost opportunities. The experience of pervasive racism can itself be traumatic.

The recent deaths and trauma, witnessed by the world, have crystalized the anger and angst born out of a history of pervasive and systemic racism. It is long past time to act. What we have not done before, we must do now. Eradicating racism deserves action from all levels of government and society. We join partners throughout our communities, our state, and our nation committed to shaping new community responses and dynamics.

Our commitment is to:

- Acknowledge racism as a public health crisis and build alliances and partnerships that confront and work collaboratively to end racism.
- Develop local solutions to address disparities and actively engage individuals and communities in racial and social justice work.
- Develop, implement, and support policies and practices to end the inequalities in the health of people of color and mitigate exposure to adverse childhood experiences and trauma.
- Ensure health equity and cultural competence within all mental health and substance use disorder prevention, treatment, and recovery support programs, ensuring services meet the local needs of diverse populations.
- Engage ALL communities to work with state and local behavioral health leaders to develop and promote prevention and awareness efforts designed to reduce stigma, address trauma, and eliminate barriers to care.

We stand in solidarity with everyone seeking to achieve equality and a healthy community where racism is not tolerated.

Unanimously Approved by the OACBHA Members on June 5, 2020