

To the office of Senator David Burke:

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 Julia A. Wyche, and I submit this letter in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 14 (SCR 14), declaring the racism a public health crisis.

The United States of America is one of the most dangerous places for a pregnant woman. Although our technology and medical training are considered some of the most advanced in the world, we have consistently ranked as one of the lowest concerning maternal mortality rates. In fact, when measured against other developed countries with similar wealth and resources, we've ranked last and are the only with a continuously falling rate. According to the World Health Organization, 75% of women worldwide who fall victim to death before, during, or after pregnancy succumb to severe bleeding, infections, high blood pressure during pregnancy, complications during delivery, and unsafe abortions. The majority of those conditions are preventable or treatable. Only recently have states been required to provide standardized data for maternal mortality rates, including a 'pregnancy' checkbox on death certificates, with hopes to garner better understanding of this critical issue. Previously states reported estimates and sparse data and took a ten year pause in nationally reporting any maternal mortality rate at all.

Although this information is shocking, even more so are the racial disparities associated with these rates. The maternal death rate for black women was more than double that of white women. This frightening statistic crosses economic lines and educational backgrounds. It doesn't matter who she is, giving birth as a black woman in this country is statistically more dangerous, and more likely to end in her death. Many black women retell their stories of feeling that their medical concerns were dismissed and not taken seriously, that they received inadequate postnatal care instructions and notes on how to be aware when something was wrong, they were talked down to, and it was implied they wouldn't understand the medical explanations, among many other reasons. I myself experienced delivery complications related to preeclampsia and hemorrhaging. I had to be hospitalized for days away from my infant son and young daughter. I had a healthy pregnancy, proper prenatal care, a scheduled delivery with no surprises. And I, like so many other black mothers, found myself in the emergency room fighting for my life.

There is ample research that shows racial discrepancy in medical treatment. Microaggressions, unconscious bias, systemic racism, and discrimination of all types are present in the healthcare system, like so many other systems in America. Statistics on teen pregnancy, premature births, and infant mortality confirm that these issues are disproportionately affecting women of color. In most cases, women with fewer resources and support are even more vulnerable.

The health of a community can be measured in many different ways, the availability of affordable housing, the presence of crime, the success of students in school, access to healthcare, transportation. However, there is no more significant indicator than racial disparities and inequities to show just how sick a community is. Columbus has several programs, citywide efforts, initiatives, and recommendations on how to best resolve the above problems and as a resident of Columbus, I'm proud to know our

community is addressing these vital concerns head-on, but how can you find solutions without addressing the root of the problem? Racism is real, prevalent, and ever consuming the Black experience. Until we are able to honestly confront systemic racism, any health crisis we face will only continue to plague the black community disproportionately. Healthcare and access are critical to the wellbeing of a city, and within those systems, there is no place for those who believe all patients are not deserving of the best and most effective care, no matter their race. I implore those with the ability to make this declaration that racism is a public health crisis to do so, with immediacy and conviction.

Thank you to the sponsors of this resolution, Senator Williams and Senator Craig, as well as the committee.

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