

Congresswoman Robin L. Kelly

Illinois Second Congressional District

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I'd like to thank the Committee for this opportunity today to speak before you and testify on behalf of the families of Illinois' Second Congressional District, and on behalf of millions of Americans whose livelihoods are adversely impacted due to health inequities that exist in our nation.

To those who do not know me, my name is Robin Kelly, and I Chair the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust. I have always been of the belief that the zip code you are born in should NEVER determine how long you live in this country, or how healthy you are.

Grandmothers shouldn't have to decide between paying their electric bill or paying for their diabetes medicine. Parents should not have to decide between putting food in their refrigerator or paying for an \$80 dental procedure.

But those are decisions that are being made every day for far too many Americans. And too often, they have devastating and fatal consequences.

Last Congress I authored a report – *The Kelly Report on Health Disparities in America* – an official Congressional analysis of the state of African American health in the U.S. that offers a blueprint for reversing negative health trends in communities of color.

The Kelly Report outlines the grim state of Black Health in America, and remedies to reverse the negative health statistics plaguing communities of color. Consider this:

- African Americans have higher rates of mortality than any other racial or ethnic group for 8 of the top 10 causes of death
- African American cancer rates are 10% higher than white Americans
- Blacks are nearly twice as likely to have diabetes than whites
- African Americans are six times more likely than whites to be victims of homicide, and Black youth especially do not have consistent access to the culturally sensitive, trauma-informed mental health care that would alleviate their burden
- While Blacks account for just 13% of the total U.S. population, they account for nearly half of all new HIV infections

Those facts are startling.

In a broader public health context, there is still much to be done to address the fact that

- An estimated 1.5 million Americans suffer from Lupus
- There is no reason we shouldn't be able to find the root causes of lupus and a cure.

We must also invest in and address the fact that mental illness is the leading cause of disability in developed countries like the U.S.

And we must address the often overlooked problem of oral health in America. People of color suffer from disproportionate rates of tooth loss, untreated dental caries, and untreated tooth decay.

This Committee has a tall task in ensuring that our appropriations priorities reflect the health needs of the most vulnerable in this nation. It's a worthy goal, but it should be our mission.

I ask that the Committee support my requests to invest in our most vulnerable. Fund health delivery service sites in medically underserved areas (urban and rural) and place support programs that encourage primary care providers to practice in communities with shortages.

The requests you'll receive from me will ask that you prioritize health professions training programs, like the Minority Centers of Excellence and Health Careers Opportunities Program.

Additionally, my office has put together a list of what we see as the most beneficial and impactful health programs for you to appropriate funds to for this Labor, HHS cycle.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

Yield.