

OPINION

This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.

Opinion: Declare an emergency on epidemic of childhood trauma

Ronald Hummons Opinion contributor

Published 1:06 p.m. ET Mar. 12, 2021

Did you know that childhood trauma could translate into low productivity, high turnover, sinking morale and rising health care costs? Ohio Representative Tom Brinkman has been a pivotal ally in declaring a state of emergency on childhood trauma. We need other elected officials to push for the same call to action. Despite our hearings and push to move forward with policy changes, the lack of response is disheartening. Childhood trauma impacts the lives of many, directly and indirectly.

As I continue to research childhood trauma, the more I realize that it is not just one agency's responsibility. Ohio has a history of cutting funding to the very agency that is supposed to service the victims of childhood trauma. Did you know that our state spends 1.3% of the overall budget on child protective services, while spending 2.9% of the overall budget on the corrections department? As an entrepreneur, providing a solution by addressing the childhood trauma that has created more costs to the state would allow for finances to be allocated differently.

The studies on childhood trauma represent a direct correlation of untreated trauma with the increase of police interactions. Knowing this, our lawmakers have made little effort to address childhood trauma to help lessen the need for such a large budget. After researching, I found the following facts:

Most people in Ohio and the rest of the country have at least one (Adverse Childhood Experience) ACE. People with an accumulation of childhood adversities – including divorce, racism, living with an alcoholic parent and physical abuse – have a higher risk of adult onset of chronic health problems such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, suicide and alcoholism.

Toxic stress caused by ACEs damages the function and structure of kids developing brains.

Toxic stress caused by ACEs affects every part of the body, leading to autoimmune diseases, such as arthritis, as well as heart disease, breast cancer, lung cancer, etc.

Toxic stress caused by ACEs can alter how our DNA functions, and how that can be passed on from generation to generation.

The brain of a teen with a high ACE score can be healed with cognitive behavior therapy, and schools can integrate trauma-informed and resilience-building practices that result in an increase in students' scores, test grades and graduation rates

Knowing all these facts and knowing that lawmakers have these studies makes the lack of call to action on childhood trauma all the more disturbing. Childhood trauma is most likely to occur in areas with lower socioeconomic status and higher crime rates. It is no secret that low-income areas have the highest crime rate. Areas with the highest crime rate have the highest instances of childhood trauma. The only way to fix a broken system is to properly fund the solutions to the problem. How do you fund a solution when there is no funding available in the budget? That solution is to declare a state of emergency.

Governors in the United States have the ability to declare an official state of emergency in the face of events such as natural disasters or disease outbreaks. According to the Ohio Emergency Management Agency, these state responses to an official emergency may include grants, conducting and supporting investigations into the cause, treatment, prevention of disease, and temporary reassignment of state and local personnel.

Because of the loss of life and strain on local resources caused by the opioid crisis, many people in Ohio advocated for the opioid issue to be declared as a state of emergency. Their voices were heard, and it was declared on a state and federal level. Billions of funds were allocated towards the dismantling of a crisis rooted in trauma.

Drug use by victims of childhood trauma is a common way of self-medicating. Why not fund a solution to help eliminate the root cause of many opioid addictions? Why are we not funding the solutions to reduce and address untreated childhood trauma?

Most children with the highest instances of childhood trauma are Black and brown. Do our lawmakers fail to see the benefit of providing a solution to a demographic that they cannot relate with? Do our lawmakers not want to help those of lower socioeconomic status? Children that have untreated childhood trauma are more likely to end up in prison. Are we funding prisons, the big business in Ohio, rather than allocating the funds to resources that can provide a solution to reduce the likelihood of childhood trauma? Is this a systematic issue that reaps rewards for our trauma?

I am a survivor of childhood trauma. As I think back to my own childhood, I see that the system was broken even when I was a child. Having experienced firsthand what childhood trauma can do to a person, I have the solution. Declaring a state of emergency on childhood trauma is in the best interest for all in the state of Ohio.

Brinkman is an ally who is fighting for policy changes that will allow for a solution. It is easier to heal a wounded child than it is to fix a broken adult. To learn more about the state of emergency on childhood trauma, visit: <https://ohiostateofemergency.com/>.

Ronald Hummons is an author and mental health activist who lives in Reading. His son, TrePierre Hummons, was shot and killed by police in 2015 after TrePierre killed Cincinnati Police Officer Sonny Kim. Hummons runs a campaign to raise awareness and funds for undiagnosed mental illness in his son's name.