

Dear Senator Mary Daugherty Abrams, Representative Jonathan Steinberg, and Members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly, my name is SciHonor Devotion Bey of Bridgeport, CT and I am in support of S.B. No 1, An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.

I am the founder of Earth's Natural Touch: Birth Care & Beyond, the largest doula training organization and collaborative in the state of Connecticut. In 2016, it was important for me to start training doulas here in Connecticut because at that time, I could find barely a handful of doulas that looked like me. Research shows that families benefit from having accessible, equitable care, with culturally / racially congruent care providers.

Our doulas provide physical, emotional, informational, and logistical support to parents and families that we serve. As doulas, we know that every client we support is at risk in this country considering the high rates of maternal mortality we have here. Compared to other developed countries, our county is failing. The CDC says that over 700 women lose their lives to pregnancy related issues and 60% of those deaths could have been prevented. We are dropping the ball. Doulas could help to make some rebounds so that we don't lose as many lives.

We know that this is an equity issue as well. While maternal mortality does not discriminate, people do, which makes racism a huge underlying risk factor that HAS to be addressed. Therefore, we see more Black lives being lost than any other demographic. Our clients here in Connecticut range in socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, marital status and educational status. You may have read the headlines about the pregnancy related deaths of Pediatric Doctor Chaniece Wallace who dies of preeclampsia last October, Shalon Irving, an epidemiologist at the CDC, or Shamony Gibson, ShaAsia Washington, Amber Isaac, Lashonda Hazard who kept being sent home by her hospital, Kira Johnson who was left to bleed to death for over 10 hours after a rushed cesarean section, and list goes on and on. These women ranged in range in socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, marital status and educational status. What was the common trend? They were all Black and they were all ignored. We have had clients ourselves, right here in Connecticut who have been in situations that could have led to maternal morbidity and mortality had we not guided them to get the medical help they needed.

I have been a birth doula since 2001 and a postpartum doula and childbirth educator since 2002. I am currently a midwifery student. The only thing that has changed since I started in this field is the national attention that has been given to Black families who are losing mothers and the effort by legislators like you and other community members working to ensure that the issues of maternal morbidity and mortality and infant mortality are addressed in an equitable, culturally relevant way. Doulas can assist families prior to conception, through pregnancy, labor and birth, postpartum, lactation and even if there was a loss by providing bereavement support.

Research shows that with Doula Support there are many benefits to both parent and child. The length of labor is shorter, and parents experience less pain and anxiety. There is decreased use of augmentation drugs, vacuum and forceps use, and pain medication such as epidural. Babies are born with higher APGAR scores and with lower incidences of being born with low birth weight and preterm. Birthing people are experiencing an earlier onset of lactogenesis and are initiating breastfeeding more often and are nursing for longer periods of time. There are also less cesarean births. 34.8% of live births in CT are cesarean births, the national average is 31.9%. Overall, there is an increase in patient birth satisfaction and lower medical costs.

In order to achieve those benefits, Doulas work hard! We are on-call most of our lives sacrificing time from our own families in order to help others. We are continuously educating ourselves and staying up to date on current research, and pregnancy and parenting practices. We are supporting each other because we have our own lives, school, business, family, our own health, etc. to deal with, which often gets ignored.

The current pandemic has been hard on everyone, the clients and families that we serve as well as ourselves and our own families. So many people are falling through the cracks in the systems that are supposed to help. So many pregnant or postpartum people could use a helping hand or a little support from someone who specializes in caring for specifically for them, like a Doula. We can't afford for anyone else to fall through the cracks or for any pregnant person to be ignored.

Doulas are out here in our communities supporting families as best as we can, we have always been, and we will continue to be. Having this title protection will assist with solidifying to others who we are, what we do and the value that we can bring to families all across the state.

I respectfully recommend the following: Lines 204-207 reflect a "doula" means a trained, nonmedical professional who provides physical, emotional, and informational support to a pregnant person before, during, and after birth, in person or virtually.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony regarding the doula profession. In closing, I urge you to support S.B. No 1 to define the doula profession.

Sincerely,

*SciHonor Devotion of Earth's Natural Touch: Birth Care & Beyond - <https://earthsnaturaltouch.com/>*

