

Dear Senator Mary Daugherty Abrams, Representative Jonathan Steinberg, and Members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly,

My name is Selena Evora and I live in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. **I stand 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 serve as a Dada Zuri Doula Trainee with Earth's Natural Touch Birth Care & Beyond. Earth's Natural Touch is the largest Black Owned Doula training organization in Connecticut, specializing in training doulas to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities, for infants and birthing people, in undervalued and underrepresented communities by promoting perinatal wellness, breastfeeding advocacy, and reducing the risk of undesirable pregnancies and birth outcomes.

This policy proposal is crucial to doulas in Connecticut. Title protection is crucial and provides stronger identity and credibility and prevents misrepresentation of the profession. A doula is a non-medical professional trained in childbirth who provides emotional, physical, and informational support to a person who is expecting, is experiencing labor, or has recently given birth. A doula's purpose is to help people have safe, memorable, and empowering birthing experiences.

A doula is an educated perinatal health advocate who supports the birthing person and their family through their most vulnerable stages of life, including but not limited to, fertility, childbirth, maternal or infant loss, and the postpartum period. The work of a doula goes beyond the scope of providing emotional support to their clients. A doula is responsible for providing education, evidence-based care using culturally appropriate crisis interventions, while adhering and respecting family values. Due to institutionalized racism and implicit racial biases, the medical industry lacks the empathy and cultural understandings of families in underrepresented communities. Utilizing perinatal advocates in maternal health services encourages community-based health intervention aimed at reducing barriers for people who have limited health literacy, lower socioeconomic status' and belong to racially, ethnically and gender-diverse populations.

Among high-income countries, the United States consistently faces the worst rate of pregnancy/childbirth-related deaths. Connecticut sees substantial and persistent disparities in maternal deaths by race and ethnicity. Black women are three to four times as likely to die during or related to pregnancy than white women, regardless of socioeconomic status. Increasing equitable access to doula care services, especially in under-resourced communities, has been shown to improve outcomes for both mothers and newborns. Doulas and the care they provide can improve these outcomes.

Growing up, I had always had an interest in working with Black Maternal Health. During my undergraduate career at the University of Rhode Island, I integrated Health Studies and Gender Women's Studies to provide me a preliminary knowledge of the current state of the healthcare industry and gender violence. As I continued my education at DePaul University obtaining a Master of Public Health in Social Epidemiology, I was exposed to the historical and epidemiological practices that disempowered Black women in receiving the health care that they deserve. The United States has abused and mishandled Black maternal health since the nation's conceptions and reform is long overdue. As a trained profession in the field, it is our job to speak out against these atrocities and use our voice to create a collective change.

Currently the State of Rhode Island has introduced Bill H 5609 which provides doula support through Medicaid similar to S.B.No.1. It is my hope that Connecticut will approve this bill to set an example for

neighboring states to adopt this model and provide doula protection and support in the healthcare industry.

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.

Lastly, **I commend the efforts of the study** to determine whether the Department of Public Health should establish a state certification process by which a person can be certified as a state doula to ensure no doula be barred from this process.

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,
Selena Evora