

My name is Cynthia Hayes and I live in New Haven, Connecticut. I stand in support of SB 1 Doula Definition.

I became a postpartum doula almost 17 years ago. I was separated and would soon divorce my husband – but I had ambitious goals. I was looking for a second job that I would love so that I could afford a new home for my family. I was also finishing my B.S. in business management (graduated magna cum laude, but I digress). I have already understood the importance of this role during birth, and support during the '4<sup>th</sup> trimester' (postpartum). I was with an agency that charged a sizeable sum to any families in the Fairfield and New Haven counties (primarily) that could afford it. I enjoyed supporting families in this way. There was a young family that needed my help for just one night. I discovered that many families in Fairfield County were often transient and had very, little family support. Her family was coming from out of town and her husband called our agency feeling desperate as the mother had been crying incessantly, unable to breastfeed and wasn't able to sleep and, '...please would someone come just for one night to help my wife until her family arrives'? I showed up and listened intently while she held her sleeping baby – clearly bruised from the birthing experience. This new mother had a very, difficult birth – to the extent that the use of forceps to remove the child from the womb became 'necessary'. She went on to say that there were more medical interventions, that seemed unnecessary but she was alone and frightened, and now she couldn't get her baby to properly latch while trying to breastfeed. It was clear that she experienced birth trauma and was now trying to make sense of it. Just empathizing with this mom, put her at ease and gave her the confidence to try again to breastfeed – which she managed successfully. She kept saying, how YOU are doing this? I assured her that it was the love for her child and her personal determination that enabled her to 'do this'. She got a full night's rest and was all smiles in the morning. This left an indelible impression on me. Here was a wealthy white woman who gave birth in a premier hospital and experienced poor treatment – there's not enough time to go into all of the details. This brought me to extensive research. I kept thinking, what are black women experiencing when they give birth?

I came across a film on a PBS station named, 'A Doula Story'; anyone doing this work needs to see this movie. I thought, '...they have community doula programs for black mothers in Chicago?! This is what I need to do!' It was by this time that I had already learned that the United States had the highest rate of pregnancy and childbirth related deaths in the developed world and that the death of black women could be anywhere from 3 to 12 times that number of birth related deaths – depending on where they live **regardless of education or economical status**. I sought to have more in-depth training to become a birth and labor doula - and that's the short story on how I became part of the Earth's Natural Touch: Birth Care and Beyond collective. The founder, SciHonor Devotion has put together a comprehensive, culturally competent and robust program that gives each doula the skills and confidence to provide exemplary services to any family. This is a group of Black, powerful women from various backgrounds. There are some with a medical background. Some are teachers; others are social workers and licensed clinicians; and most recently a doctoral student and attorney – all who will provide childbirth education, continuous support during labor and deliver and lactation support to families in Connecticut to improve the negative outcomes that currently exist. The time has come for proper recognition of doulas in Connecticut, so that we can further the work. **Everyone in Connecticut deserves a doula**. Thank you for your consideration and support for Connecticut families.