

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

My name is Callie Gale Heilmann and I live in Bridgeport. **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 am President & Co-Director of Bridgeport Generation Now, a member-based grassroots organization in Bridgeport, building power to end systemic racism and corruption so that we can build the just, equitable, and livable city we know is possible.

At Gen Now, we organize the Bridgeport Antiracism Collective, a supportive space for people in the Bridgeport area who are dedicated to developing their own practice and commitment to antiracism in all areas of their lives. In fact, we are holding an “Undoing Racism” training for Bridgeport community leaders in May.

So today I am taking off my “org” hat and I am here speaking to you all as a white woman - who is committed to antiracism and a mother. I am so grateful that I heard Dr. Everett’s testimony. Rep. Zupkus said that we can’t legislate love - and I would respectfully disagree. If we can legislate hate - we can legislate love. But how do we know that we’ve spent 400 years legislating hate?

Because racism - as a system - is the concept of race (which we know is invented) plus the concept of prejudice (hierarchy) plus the POWER to carry out laws, policies, and violence. So no - we won’t end racism overnight. But yes, we can work to end racism by enacting antiracist laws, policies, and budgets. And those laws, policies, and budgets must be directed at ending racial disparities.

As Dr. Everette said, Connecticut ranks #41 in the country when it comes to racial health disparities. And I know as a woman and a doula, that the healthcare system and medical profession is not supportive of holistic approaches to pregnancy and childbirth, period. 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.

**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.

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.

**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,  
Callie Gale Heilmann