

Written Testimony on S.B. No. 1, Defining a Doula
Submitted by Alisha S. Rodriguez
March 17, 2021

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

My name is Alisha Rodriguez and 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.

As a doula in training, I can attest to the importance of doulas in providing guidance and support to birthing people from the preconception period to postpartum. A doula is a trained, non-medical professional who provides emotional, physical, and informational support to a person who is expecting, is experiencing labor, or has recently given birth. All birthing people can benefit from a doula working as part of a client's multidisciplinary team, but especially Black birthing people, who suffer from higher rates of maternal mortality nationwide.

Across the nation, there is a maternal health crisis that is disproportionately impacting Black families. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported this disparity in a variety of reports often citing that Black women are 3 to 4 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women. These disparities persist in infant mortality with Black infants in Connecticut being 3 times more likely to die before their first birthday than infants born to white women. A doula's purpose is to help people have safe, memorable, and empowering birthing experiences.

I think of the Black women in my own family who have benefitted from doulas throughout their pregnancy. I think of the birthing people I know who were empowered to make decisions about birth when they were provided the necessary support and information to do so. Doulas not only provide emotional support but can also impact physical outcomes including shorter labor length, decreased use of oxytocin in labor, decreased risk of Cesarean sections and higher rates of breastfeeding initiation. The impact of a doula extends beyond just the individual birthing person and reverberates throughout that person's entire family including better health outcomes for infants and better birthing experiences for families.

Your support is imperative. Title protection is crucial to credibility and prevents misrepresentation of the doula profession. **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 and support S.B. No. 1, An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.

Sincerely,
Alisha S. Rodriguez