

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

My name is Kristianna Smith and I live in New Britain, Connecticut. **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.**

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.

As a first time Black mother, I chose to give birth at home. I did this, because I believed that it was the safest option for me and my child. I was able to have a beautiful birth surrounded by love and support. My entire labor lasted 5 hours. An integral part of this support was the coaching and encouragement of my doula. She gently reminded me that I was powerful, magical, that I was doing everything right. We understand why sports coaches are important- I can't imagine us suggesting having a new school sport without a coach. Yet, we ask birthing people to do one of the most strenuous activities known to the human body without guarantee they will have an experienced consistent supporter by their side. This is the essential and ever necessary role a doula provides.

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.

Through my work with Doulas4CT I have had the opportunity to listen to many Black mothers tell their birth stories. My story, one filled with magic and safety and love- is an outlier in the experience of my Black peers. Even typing this breaks my heart. We must do better, and doulas are a part of that solution.

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,

Kristianna J. Smith