

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

My name is Katherine Villeda and I live in Bridgeport, 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. I specifically would like to support Sections 6 & 7 to declare racism as a public health crisis in Connecticut and establish a commission to study the impact of institutional racism on public health and section 10 to establish the definition of a doula within state statutes and conduct a study to determine the establishment of a state certification process for doulas.

S.B.1 is an opportunity for our state to lead the pursuit for racial justice with action. I stand with the Connecticut Campaign to Address Racism as a Public Health Crisis and ask that the following recommendations also be considered in this bill.

- The name of the commission be changed to be reflective of its work ie. “The Connecticut Commission on Racial Impact and Reconciliation”
- A commitment to 2 members of the proposed commission be persons of color, residing in a major city of Connecticut with an annual income of less than \$65,000 creating a total of 12 commission members.
- Expand racial/ethnic data collection to expose disparities in communities.
- A review and reform of the legislative process to improve public accessibility and set in place mechanisms to determine the impact of proposed legislation on race.
- Training for OLR and OFA to create racial and ethnic impact assessments
- Establishing a clear racial equity approach in policies set forth by the executive branch.

Additionally, 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. Since I have learned about the doula profession and have had the opportunity to work with doulas, I often reflect on how my mother’s own birthing experiences may have been positive had she had a doula when she had me as a recent arrival to this country and monolingual Spanish-speaker. The intention of the doula relationship is to tap into and develop a birthing parent's inherent power to make decisions for the well-being of themselves and their family and ensure the birthing parent’s wishes are respected.

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 and to declare racism as a public health emergency.

Sincerely,
Katherine Villeda