

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

My name is Kerry-Ann Walters 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.

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.

The work of a doula has been around long before the term was coined. As a doula I am well aware of the positive impact one has on the birthing person she is serving. In 2015, I lost a family friend to negligence by the hospital she delivered her son at just 3 days prior. She was experiencing symptoms of a pulmonary embolism yet the medical providers sent her back home to rest. When she finally went back to the hospital with severe signs it was too late for them to reverse the damage that had already been done. Just three days of welcoming her son into the world, we had no clue we would have to say goodbye to her.

Having support for the birthing person can greatly reduce the instances of preventable deaths occurring in our communities. It is so important for women of color to have the proper representation in doula care because we are the ones dying at a higher rate from childbirth and pregnancy related complications. Too many black women, including my family friend, have either not known about doula care or have passed it up because of the expense; let alone the taboo that doulas are for white women and/or celebrities. Having doulas of color supporting those in their communities is essential in alleviating the maternal morbidity crisis occurring all over the world. Connecticut is not immune, in our state babies born to black mothers are more than three times more likely to die in their first year of life, and babies born to Latina mothers are more than twice as likely to die in their first year than those born to white mothers.

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. Doulas are warding off discrimination and racism in birthing rooms, giving people tools they need to make the best decisions around their pregnancy, lowering the cost of childbirth, and aiding in healthier and happier experiences during delivery. I am a doula and my hope is that every woman has the proper information on doulas and this bill will help with just that. Through gaining access to doulas who look like them, more women of color will be able to take control of their care and advocate for themselves.

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,
Kerry-Ann Walters