

Public Health Committee Public Hearing - March 17, 2021

Testimony of Susan L Yolen on behalf of PoliticaCT in support of Senate Bill No. 1, *An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic*

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and members of the Public Health Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 1, *An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic* -- in particular, Section 10 defining the doula profession.

PoliticaCT is a membership-based statewide organization whose mission is to build a more progressive Connecticut through issue advocacy for smart public policies.

First, we would like to strongly commend the focus on racial equity throughout this bill. We especially support declaring racism a public health crisis and improving data collection of race, ethnicity and language to better identify problems and improve outcomes in public health, health care, and other related areas.

Our testimony today concentrates on Section 10 regarding doulas. PoliticaCT supports legislative action to make doula services more available and affordable to women. Doulas are trained non-medical professionals who provide physical, emotional and informational support to a person before, during and after pregnancy and delivery in order to help achieve the healthiest and most satisfying birth experience possible.

The US has an unacceptably high maternal mortality rate, far higher than other developed countries. These rates are particularly and shockingly high for Black women and women of color, even when adjusted for income and educational levels, pointing to the racial bias that persists in health care. Our state's high infant mortality rate of babies born to Black and Latina mothers and higher-than-average number of cesarean births are also a loud signal that Connecticut can and must act now.

Doulas can make the pregnancy and birthing experience faster, safer, and more successful for both mothers and newborns -- reducing stress, pain, and financial costs.

Section 10 of this bill creates a legislative definition of what is a doula and directs the

Department of Public Health to study the creation of a state certification process by which a person can be certified as a doula. Establishing a credentialing process is an important pathway to both formally value doulas' skill and service, and prevent misrepresentation of the profession. We believe this is an important -- and urgent -- first step needed to expand the use, availability and access to doula services.

PoliticaCT urges support and passage of Senate Bill 1. Thank you.

