

April 17th, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Elisabeth Marnik, I am a resident of Ellsworth and I am here today in support of LD 1523 An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services. I am a patient who has benefitted from doula care.

After the birth of my first child, I experienced a severe postpartum hemorrhage. As a team of providers worked quickly to stabilize me, a doula was there—not just for me, but for my husband and our brand-new baby. She stayed calm, offered reassurance, and helped ensure our son's first moments weren't chaotic or frightening. During my second birth, a doula was again essential. When the fetal heart monitor kept losing signal because of how much my baby was moving, my doula held it in place for hours so that the medical team could get the data they needed, and so I could continue laboring in upright positions that eased my pain and supported progress. Because of these two doulas, I felt safe, supported, and empowered throughout both of my births, despite their complications.

Unfortunately, not everyone has stories with happy endings like mine. We're facing a maternal health crisis in this country that is worse in rural areas like those we have in much of Maine. Doulas fill critical gaps in our maternal health system and can be an important part of the solution.

Data consistently show that doulas improve birth outcomes. This has been supported in many research papers, and again recently in a paper published in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology that found that "Doula care was associated with more vaginal births after cesarean delivery, improved attendance of postpartum office visits, improved breastfeeding rates, and fewer preterm deliveries."

These improved outcomes will help lower healthcare costs and improve the health of Mainers. Unfortunately, not everyone has access to doulas due to the cost. Patients deserve this access, and doulas deserve to be paid for their work and time.

Every birthing person deserves the kind of comprehensive, continuous care I received during both of my births. Making doulas a covered service on MaineCare would be an instrumental first step in increasing access to doula care for the populations that need this support the most.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I hope you will vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1523.

Thank you,  
Elisabeth Marnik, PhD