

April 17th, 2025

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

My name is Abusana Micky Bondo, I am a resident of Portland and I am here today in support of **LD 1523 *An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services***.

I am the co-founder of In Her Presence, an immigrant women-led organization which empowers immigrant women in Maine. We serve women who are facing barriers to accessing adequate and quality perinatal services, which negatively impacts immigrant maternal and infant health.

I know from my own experience how critical access to doulas can be for a non-native English speaker trying to navigate the United States' system of perinatal care. Doulas provide emotional, informational, logistical, and physical supports that lead to: Increased comprehension of rights and care options during pregnancy and birth; increased adherence to provider treatment and preventive care plans; increased working knowledge of infant care best practices, as well as postpartum anxiety and depression warning signs. These are unique services that only doulas provide and do so in a community-based way, in home and community settings.

In 2024, In Her Presence established Maine's first formal cultural doula program, which adds great value to the perinatal care landscape in Maine. The reality is that the inclusion of cultural doulas—non-clinical, trained peers with cultural competency—is a gamechanger. This model will positively affect so many births by building trust, providing additional language support, and reducing newly arrived patients' confusion in navigating the perinatal system.

The women that In Her Presence serves are facing compounding hardships that make affording doula care essentially impossible when this care is not covered by insurance. MaineCare coverage for doula services will drive growth for the doula workforce, allowing for more people from different communities that are experiencing the brunt of health disparities to serve their communities during the critical perinatal period. And we believe we will see improved health outcomes and systems engagement within marginalized communities under this policy change.

This change is so important if we want to create better outcomes in perinatal care, where all women, regardless of their origins, gain access to this amazing opportunity for doula care.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective, and please support LD 1523.

Thank you,
Abusana Micky Bondo
Co-Founder, In Her Presence
www.inherpresence.org