

April 17, 2025

Hello, my name is Ariel Zodhiates and I live and work in Portland.

Senator Ingerwsen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to address the committee. As a family physician running a prenatal care program at a community health center in Portland, I am here to voice my strong support of **LD 1523, An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services**.

I support LD 1523 because doula care is a vital part of the perinatal care landscape in Maine. My patients are largely newly arrived immigrants, women of color, with significant barriers to accessing care including language, transportation, cultural and logistical hurdles. We know that Maine's perinatal health crisis disproportionately affects BIPOC pregnant people and those living in rural areas. Between 2016-2019, the severe maternal morbidity rate (complications that result in significant consequences to a birthing pregnant person's health) for delivery hospitalizations was [176% higher](#) for Black Mainers than for white Mainers.

Our prenatal care program aims to reduce those barriers, and improve perinatal outcomes by helping New Mainers engage in early, high quality prenatal care in their primary care home, and transition them to midwife and OB teams at local hospitals to provide safe and culturally appropriate end of pregnancy care and delivery. Doulas have been incredible partners in this program, helping our vulnerable patients understand the labor and childbirth process, advocate for their own care, and form strong relationships to check on moms and babies in the crucial postpartum period. The evidence shows that Doulas positively impact birth experiences and outcomes.

Having MaineCare cover Doula services would stabilize and grow the Doula workforce and ensure doula services are accessible to all patients who want them.

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,

Ariel Zodhiates, MD