

Apr 16, 2025

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

My name is Megan Whithed and I am a resident of Durham. I am a Holistic Nutritionist specializing in perinatal care, a mother, and have worked as a Postpartum Doula. I am here today in support of LD 1523 *An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services*

As someone who works directly with families navigating pregnancy, labor, postpartum recovery, and early parenting - I have seen how critical access to this care impacts families.

- I have supported a first-time, anxious mother over the Christmas holiday - when providers were unavailable -responding in the middle of the night as she questioned whether something was an emergency.
- I've worked with a family balancing a newborn and three neurodivergent children, where the mother—overwhelmed and exhausted—was unable to access food, rest, or support without in-home care.
- I've stood beside a young family as they navigated the unexpected diagnosis of their infant's deafness, helping them process, grieve, and move forward with clarity and connection.

All three of these families needed emotional support, evidence-based information, and consistent, hands-on guidance during moments of uncertainty. None of them could afford to pay me a livable wage, but my care made a tangible difference in their outcomes, safety, and ability to cope. This is the gap doulas fill every day.

Doulas are not a luxury, but society often treats them like one. Many of my families cannot afford to pay for this additional cost to their care team - often having to juggle financial strain and trade off other basic needs like childcare, rest, or even groceries in order to access this kind of support. Additionally, this out-of-pocket cost is a hard expense to swallow when the prices of diapers, formula, and eggs are astronomical. I have often cut my rate or donated my care to bridge this gap for families but this is unsustainable and causes financial strain to my business and my own Maine family.

Doulas provide a crucial bridge between clinical care and the real, lived experiences of birthing and postpartum families. They fill the gaps left by a system that can feel rushed, overwhelming, or disconnected -offering steady presence, practical help, and emotional care at a time when so much is changing.

Doulas provide connection and scaffolding for the entire family, including partners, dads, and siblings, helping everyone feel more grounded and involved. It helps parents feel less alone, catches small issues before they become big ones, and creates a more supported, healthy start for both babies and the people raising them. This kind of support can make all the difference in outcomes.

LD 1523 helps ensure that this critical care is not dependent on privilege, but made accessible to all families who need it most. I urge you to vote Ought To Pass on LD 1523.