

Gia (Jeanne) Bartolomeo, Executive Director of Community Doulas
Doula since 1981
Saco, Maine
April 17, 2025

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and Honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

My name is Gia Bartolomeo, a lifelong resident of Saco and I am here on behalf of Community Doulas.

Community Doulas is a 501c3 non-profit has been filling the gap in providing doula services for low-income families in Maine for over 10 years relying solely on the generosity of friends and neighbors. Since founding in 2014 over 95% of families we serve are MaineCare recipients. As we have worked to build awareness about the benefits of doula services with women's health and community service providers throughout the state, the demand has increased significantly. We are only able to serve about 53% of the inquiries we receive. Although we offer our member doulas a small stipend, it is well below the average cost for these services in Maine. We also provide mentorship and continuing education opportunities to member doulas.

Choosing to become a doula takes time, continuing education and commitment. It's not hourly work; it's not shift work (most doulas remain with clients continuously throughout labor and delivery) and demands the full attention of the doula while serving the client. Most doulas in Maine are independent contractors and few can work as doulas full time primarily because those who most need these services are not able to afford them. The average fee for a doula in Maine is \$1800 per birth (each birth averages about 43 hours of time including the recommended prenatal and postpartum visits). When doulas are forced to work other jobs because they can't earn enough as doulas fewer may consider this a viable career and the existing workforce becomes additionally burdened with meeting a higher demand.

Passage of this bill would create an increased awareness of these services and an increased demand. It will also allow for those choosing this career to meet that increased demand by working full time. Having a full-time doula workforce benefits Maine in multiple ways; the well-published statistics on increased confidence in parents, reductions in labor & delivery interventions, and earlier interventions for PPD already indicate significant costs savings in maternal health spending, but consider the increased tax and spending revenue brought into the state by having an adequately compensated workforce. A doula making only the "average" fee and serving just 2 clients per month would increase their household income by about \$43,000 annually.

Some of us are already providing these services without little or no compensation. We are working hard to improve infant and maternal health outcomes and to save health care costs for our beloved state of Maine and we deserve to be compensated for it. This is why I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD1523!

Thank you again for this opportunity to share my perspective with this committee.