

Testimony for LD1523
An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before this committee and share my support for LD 1523 An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services. I am Natalie Grammer, a resident of Freeport and the owner of Maine Doulas, a small business providing doula services to families in Maine. I am also a mother of two children, born in Portland.

I have been honored to guide new and growing families in Maine for the past 13 years and have seen first hand the difference that a birth or postpartum experience with doula support can make. As a doula, I ensure that parents feel educated, prepared and informed through each step to parenthood. I am hearing their stories intimately; I am on the other end of the phone, or sitting on their couches, I am alongside them at the hospital. In this unique way, I am able to spot many issues (both physical and mental) well before a medical appointment or an urgent event.

I encourage deeper connection with their doctors, midwives, and nurses, so parents ask pointed questions or engage before a concern becomes an emergency. Many families are now living in areas where birthing centers are closing. They are being left with fewer options for medical care and are at a greater risk for poor outcomes as a result. Residents of rural areas are 9% more likely to face maternal morbidity and mortality. 50% of rural areas in Maine have no hospital based obstetrical services. Doula support fills a gap, encouraging more comprehensive care. I have been witness to this in my work, seeing the signs of postpartum depression and anxiety in a new mother and encouraging intervention before it spiraled out of her control. It's often difficult for a new parent to ask for help, as images of parenthood encourage us to soldier on through trying times. A doula is a counter balance to the Instagram feed and helps a new parent ground into reality with confidence.

This type of support is currently available mostly to Maine families who can carve out funds to invest. This means that, for most, our guidance, support and education is a privilege. When it's not possible for a family to pay, many doulas choose to offer this 24/7 on call, time and resource consuming care, for low or no cost. This is not sustainable for doulas and puts a strain on our own families and on the doula community as a care giving workforce. Mainecare currently pays for 38% of births in Maine. LD 1523 would make doula services eligible for Mainecare reimbursement and this would allow more families access to this care and allow more small, women owned businesses a sustainable practice.

For the health and well being of our new and yet-to-be-born Mainers, this is vital care. I thank you for your time and your consideration to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1523.