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

My name is Kim Holden, and I reside in Portland. I am a certified birth and postpartum doula, certified lactation counselor, and registered architect. I am here today (in absentia due to a conflict) in support of **LD 1523 *An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services***.

My work is focused on the intersection of birth and design, and the impact that environment and support have on birth experiences, outcomes, racial disparities, and maternal mortality. A woman's birth experience, whether it is positive, negative, or somewhere in between, **stays with her forever**. As such, my goal is to help my clients have a healthy, dignified, and informed pregnancy, birth and postpartum experience, and to **reframe childbirth as a societal issue**, rather a "women's issue". A doula was integral to my own two pregnancies and births. The power and inspiration of those experiences led me to make a major career shift, after 25 years in design, to supporting pregnant folks and families.

I support LD 1523 because:

Benefits of doulas:

- I've been a practicing doula, in-person and remotely, for 6 years and have assisted in over 80 births and worked with over 100 families. I know from firsthand experience how critical access to a doula can be. Through education, advocacy, and support I have helped clients have healthy outcomes and empowering, dignified experiences.
- Evidence shows that when doula is part of your team, **labors are shorter with fewer complications, less pain, reduced stress and fewer unnecessary interventions**, like forceps and C-sections. **Babies are born healthier and breastfeed more easily**. The transition that comes with the arrival of a baby and the birth of a mother is made easier and the **risk of postpartum depression is reduced**.
- The unique services I provide as a doula include in-person labor and birth support, as well as childbirth education (including anatomy, physiology, design and history of birth), being available for any and all questions that arise during the perinatal period, and providing resources including referrals to specialists, such as pelvic floor therapists, access to PMADs treatment (Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders are a group of mental health conditions that can affect women during pregnancy and postpartum).
- I help my clients understand why one's birth environment should create a sense of safety and privacy, foster one's sense of agency, allow freedom of movement and change of position, and reduce stress and fear, and work with them to apply this concept to their own experiences.

Landscape of perinatal care:

- The perinatal care landscape in Maine is an **urgent maternal health crisis**. Women and families do not get the support that they need for a variety of factors including financial challenges, maternal healthcare deserts (long distance to accessing basic care), lack of perinatal knowledge, structural racism, and lack of family and community support.

Barriers to access

- Because doula care is not currently covered under insurance, **this care is inaccessible to most**. Generally speaking, the folks who cannot afford doula care, are the ones who need it the most. Ensuring accessible doula care, both in-person and remotely, is critically important because it increases the likelihood of having a healthy, positive, dignified birth experience, and decreases the likelihood of trauma, postpartum depression, and unnecessary intervention and c-sections.

Doula support is critical to getting new and growing families off to a good start. This foundation not only benefits the family, but also the community, and ultimately, **makes us a healthier, stronger society**. Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. **I hope you will vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1523.**



Kim Holden, AIA, CABD, CLC