



Denise Tepler
Senator, District 24

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Denise Tepler introducing
**LD 376, An Act to Improve Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes Through
Doula Care**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

April 17, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Senator Denise Tepler, representing Senate District #24, all of Sagadahoc County and the Town of Dresden in Lincoln County. I am here today to present **LD 376**, "An Act to Improve Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes Through Doula Care."

In 2022, my last session as the termed-out Representative from the Town of Topsham, I was fortunate to be named National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Maternal and Child Health Fellow. This meant a series of multi-day meetings both online and in person on topics in this area of health care. Of the series of actions that states were advised to take in order to improve equity and access to maternal and infant health, increasing access to Doula care was the one policy Maine had not yet enacted. Many disturbing statistics were shared at the meeting, illustrating that our wealthy and advanced nation is not taking good care of our mothers and babies. In fact, maternal and infant death rates in the U.S. are concerning high compared to most other developed nations. I came away from that fellowship determined to try to expand access to Doulas in our state through MaineCare.

In 2023, I asked Representative Kristi Mathieson to sponsor a bill to this effect. She did so, but it would have taken more preparation and heart than could be spared for someone else's idea, so she withdrew the bill over objections from the Doula associations. Now I am back, and I still feel strongly that Maine needs to take this action. I understand that hearts and minds have changed in the Department, and there is grant funding for this effort. I also understand that the loss of maternity care centers in many parts of rural Maine has deepened the need for Doula care. I further understand that the Maine Doula Association now supports this effort with several caveats I will discuss before the end of this testimony. And now, you have 2 bills, this one and LD 1523, to choose from in moving this policy forward.

My bill was based on the New York State model — the most recently passed state Doula care bill. I was given to understand that Representative Dhalac's bill is based on the Massachusetts model. They are very similar but differ slightly in the inclusion in that LD 1523 includes an advisory group, which I support. These are both important bills, and I leave it to the committee and the Department to choose which model you prefer. Either will improve equity and access to maternal and infant health care.

There are three additional policies that need to be either made part of one of these bills or adopted in Departmental rule-making. These represent policies that the Maine Doula Association has studied and recommended,

1. **Reimbursement for Doula Services must create a living wage.** No Doulas will want to serve the Mainecare population if this is not done.



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2. **The majority of Doulas now live in southern Maine.** If we want to see Doulas serve our northern Maine maternity care deserts, we must provide Doula training in the north. University of Maine Presque Isle's "YourPace" program comes to mind and could provide relevant courses.
3. **Maine must recruit Doulas from culturally diverse backgrounds.** Maine's growing diversity calls for a maternal workforce that reflects the communities it serves. Recruiting Doulas from culturally diverse backgrounds ensures that families of color, immigrant families and indigenous communities have access to birth support providers who understand their traditions, languages and unique healthcare needs. This is a vital step toward reducing disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes.

I ask you, no, I beg you, to move one of these bills forward to decrease the number of Maine women and infants who die in pregnancy or childbirth. It has been repeatedly proven that Doula care improves these outcomes. Thank you for your attention, and I am happy to answer any questions that I am able to answer.