



Maine Equal Justice  
People Policy Solutions

126 Sewall Street  
Augusta, Maine 04330-6822  
TTY/Voice: (207) 626-7058  
www.mainequaljustice.org

**Kathy Kilrain del Rio**  
Advocacy & Programs Director  
(207) 626-7058, ext. 210  
kathy@mejp.org

**MEJ Testimony *in support of* LD 1523, An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through  
Expanded Access to Doula Services**

April 17, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Kathy Kilrain del Rio, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm the Advocacy and Programs Director for Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. MEJ has worked for decades on policies related to public benefit programs, unemployment insurance, education, and training.

Supporting the health and wellbeing of pregnant people and infants is a value we all share. For that reason, the legislature has taken multiple steps over the past several legislative sessions to improve access to MaineCare for pregnant and postpartum individuals and children. We support LD 1523 as another positive step forward to support pregnant people in having positive birth experiences, which also supports positive outcomes for infants.

People with low incomes are more likely to experience poor birth outcomes,<sup>1</sup> and this can be more pronounced for Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other people of color.<sup>2</sup> Those poor outcomes can include increased risk of maternal death, pre-term birth, low birth weight infants, cesarean births, and lower breastfeeding initiation rates.<sup>3</sup> Doulas provide both prenatal and postpartum care as well as care during labor and delivery. Studies have shown that their support can lead to improved outcomes for both birthing parents and infants.<sup>4</sup> At MEJ, we have heard from clients and members of our Equal Justice Partner Circle (people with experience with low incomes) that needing to pay for doula care because it isn't covered by MaineCare is a significant barrier to accessing that care and can add financial stress at a time when their incomes may be lower due to time away from work for appointments and to recover after birth. LD 1523 would be a great help to these families.

Doulas also play a critical role in supporting pregnant individuals with understanding what's happening with their bodies and what medical providers are saying or doing. This can be especially important for people with less education, a smaller support network, or language or cultural barriers between themselves and their providers. This care has also been demonstrated to help reduce the impacts of racism and biases in health care Black, Brown, and Indigenous pregnant people or pregnant immigrants because their care focuses on the individual needs and

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://healthlaw.org/doulamedicaidproject/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/7888>

<sup>3</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10292163/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

circumstances for each person.<sup>5</sup> By its nature, doula care strives to be culturally appropriate and person-centered.

Another critical role doulas can play during pregnancy and labor is being an advocate for the person giving birth. Sadly, there is a lot of data that shows our health care systems too often fail people who are experiencing challenges in their pregnancies, which one reason we see poorer outcomes for certain populations, like people with low incomes or people of color – especially Black people.

Doulas can also play an important role in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of pregnant people and new parents. Studies have found that working with a doula can reduce stress and anxiety during pregnancy and increase positive feelings about the pregnancy.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, working with a doula can reduce the stress of labor and delivery resulting in fewer traumatic births that can cause Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). When able to access doula care after birth, new parents can have reduced stress and greater positive feelings about their infants.<sup>7</sup>

These positive outcomes for pregnant people and infants should be enough of a reason to advance this bill. However, we recognize that cost can often be a factor in a bill becoming law. Because the care doulas provide can reduce outcomes that are costly, including c-sections, pre-term births, low birth weight, and other complications, it can save our state money in the long-term.

Finally, this feels like an important moment to invest in this care because more regions across our state are losing access to birthing centers. This means pregnant people – especially those in rural areas – will have to travel farther from home for labor and delivery. Having access to a doula while you are in an unfamiliar place and potentially disconnected from your usual support network can provide essential emotional support during an often stressful time. A report from The Commonwealth Fund recommends Medicaid coverage for doula care as one way states can respond to the rural maternity care crisis.<sup>8</sup>

For these reasons, we urge you to support LD 1523. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions you have if I can.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://healthlaw.org/doulamedicaidproject/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10292163/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9257331/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2019/rural-maternity-care-crisis>