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Testimony in support:
LD 1523, "An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services"
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
April 17th, 2025

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Laura Harper, I live in Hallowell and I'm a Senior Associate at Moose Ridge Associates. I'm here today to provide testimony on behalf of my client, Maine Family Planning, in support of LD 1523, "An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services."

Maine Family Planning provides comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care to teens and adults at 19 locations statewide. Our mission is to ensure that all people have access to high-quality, culturally relevant and affordable sexual and reproductive health care services, comprehensive sexual health education, and the right to control their sexual and reproductive lives.

In addition to the sexual and reproductive health services you would assume MFP provides, we offer expanded services for pregnant women, new moms, and their families in Hancock and Washington counties. We are the WIC provider for Downeast Maine and specifically in Hancock county we operate Maine Families. This program provides in-home parenting information while developing caring, supportive relationships with parents including resources around pregnancy, nutrition, baby and child health care, breastfeeding/formula feeding, immunizations, child growth and development, discipline, toilet training, and child and household safety.

As a sexual and reproductive healthcare provider whose values are based in Reproductive Justice, we believe pregnant and parenting people deserve support through the full range of their reproductive lives. It comes as no surprise that MFP strongly supports LD 1523. We know that Doula care is an effective way to improve birth outcomes, both for the birthing parent and the baby and therefore contributes to personal reproductive empowerment. Plus, the evidence proves it. A 2023 study published in Cureus Journal of Medical Science found that Doula care in perinatal care was significantly correlated with positive delivery outcomes including reduced cesarean and premature deliveries. Doula support, specifically with low-income women, was shown to improve breastfeeding success, with quicker lactogenesis and continued breastfeeding weeks after childbirth. The emotional support provided by doulas was seen to reduce anxiety and stress during the labor period and reduce the length of labor. Women with a doula during childbirth helped raise their confidence and autonomy throughout labor.¹

¹ The Effect of Doulas on Maternal and Birth Outcomes: A Scoping Review - PMC

MaineCare coverage for doula services is a method for advancing health equity in Maine, and ensuring that all people, regardless of their race, financial status, primary language spoken, and zip code receive high quality perinatal care.

For these reasons and many more, Maine Family Planning urges you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1523. Thank you for your time today and I'm happy to try and answer any questions.