

MAINE STATE BREASTFEEDING COALITION

Board of Directors

April 17, 2025

Emily Elting
President

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

Katie Brunelle
Vice-President

My name is Kara Kaikini, I'm a resident of Freeport, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition. I'm here today in strong support of LD 1523.

Sara Morris
Treasurer

Kim Collard
Secretary

Several years before I became a Board Certified Lactation Consultant in 2009, I trained as a birth and postpartum doula. Even before my own pregnancies and births, I recognized how deeply vulnerable this time is in a person's life. The physical, emotional, and educational demands are enormous—and trying to manage them without support felt not only overwhelming, but inequitable. The more families I supported, the more it became clear: every birthing person deserves access to the kind of compassionate, continuous care doulas provide.

**Petrichor
Kneeland-Campbell**
Past President

Amy Marchessault
At-Large Director

Expanding access to doulas in Maine ensures families feel seen, supported, and empowered—which should be reason enough. But we also know doula care leads to better outcomes. A recent study analyzing Medicaid claims from over 700 patients found that those supported by doulas were 46% more likely to attend a postpartum visit—a critical opportunity to address complications, mental health, and chronic conditions. These patients also had 47% fewer C-sections and 29% fewer preterm births¹.

Lucy Nelson
At-Large Director

Shauna Goulet
At-Large Director

Dr. Tristan Rowe
At-Large Director

Staff

Kara Kaikini
Executive Director

Doulas also play a vital role in supporting breastfeeding. A 2020 study in *The Journal of Perinatal Education* linked doula support to significantly higher breastfeeding initiation and continuation—both of which are especially important in rural areas of Maine, where access to lactation care is limited. We know that breastfeeding improves health outcomes and reduces healthcare costs².

A 2013 study in the *Journal of Midwifery and Women's Health* found that 97.9% of Medicaid-covered women with doula care initiated breastfeeding—compared to 80.8% without. For Black women, those numbers rose from 70.3% to 92.7%³. That's not just success—it's progress toward real health equity.

These numbers represent stronger families, fewer complications, and real savings for MaineCare. Reimbursing doulas is a smart, compassionate, and fiscally responsible investment in maternal and infant health—and in the future of our state.

I also want to thank this committee for recently voting LD 865 Ought To Pass to require medicaid reimbursement of private practice IBCLCs (International Board Certified Lactation Consultants). There was some discussion about covering Certified Lactation Counselors (CLCs) as well. I'd like to note that many doulas are also CLCs. If LD 1523 passes, more families will gain access not just to doulas, but also to additional breastfeeding support through these trained CLCs.

Thank you so much for your time and your continued support of Maine families.

Sincerely,
Kara Kaikini, MS, IBCLC
Executive Director
Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition

Sources:

1. April M. Falconi, Leah Ramirez, Rebecca Cobb, Carrie Levin, Michelle Nguyen, and Tiffany Inglis: Role of Doulas in Improving Maternal Health and Health Equity Among Medicaid Enrollees, 2014–2023; *American Journal of Public Health* 114, 1275–1285, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2024.307805>, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2024.307805>
2. Acquaye SN, Spatz DL. An Integrative Review: The Role of the Doula in Breastfeeding Initiation and Duration. *J Perinat Educ*. 2021 Jan 1;30(1):29–47. doi: 10.1891/J-PE-D-20-00037. Epub 2020 Dec 28. PMID: 33488045; PMCID: PMC7819475.
3. Kozhimannil KB, Attanasio LB, Hardeman RR, O'Brien M. Doula care supports near-universal breastfeeding initiation among diverse, low-income women. *J Midwifery Womens Health*. 2013 Jul-Aug;58(4):378–82. doi: 10.1111/jmwh.12065. Epub 2013 Jul 9. PMID: 23837663; PMCID: PMC3742682.