

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

My name is Cait Vaughan, and I am a doula serving Cumberland County, here to testify in strong support of **LD 1523, *An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services***. I have been practicing as a doula for over 5 years. The majority of my work has been pro bono, and families who have paid for my services have never been capable of paying the top of my sliding scale fee schedule. As a result, I have yet to make a positive return—in more than half a decade—on my monetary investment in training, materials, marketing costs, and wear and tear on my vehicle.

I have primarily served MaineCare enrolled clients, with a focus on those with significant trauma histories, substance use disorders, incarceration histories, and unstable housing situations. Queer and trans parents also seek me out as a birth advocate. I also co-created the Cultural Doula Program housed at In Her Presence, which supports newly arrived immigrant pregnant and postpartum women through cross-cultural collaborative doula teams.

Some of my experiences as a doula include:

- Postpartum visits to the HoJos in South Portland with an unhoused client
- Gathering donations from community organizations and friends because my clients could not afford all the new things that a baby requires
- Holding a wailing postpartum mother in my arms while her newborn was discharged from the NICU and directly into foster care
- Supervising visits for a client and her children and participating in years of family team meetings while she worked on her recovery and sought to reunify with her kids
- Gently educating and counseling labor and delivery nurses in correct pronouns and anatomical terms for use with transgender clients
- Listening to an immigrant mother who didn't show up for her scheduled induction share that she was avoiding giving birth because she didn't want to bring her newborn to the shelter where her family was sleeping on thin mats on the floor

I share these glimpses so you will understand that doulas are frontline care workers trying to plug up a dam with just our pinky fingers; and yet, we somehow manage to hold back entire floods of concerns, questions, and barriers that would otherwise submerge the families with whom we work.

Birthwork has shown me both the utter failings of our society and simultaneously revealed to me a microcosm of who we can become when care and compassion are foregrounded in systematic ways. But that better world we dream of needs to be doula-ed into existence through our collective investment.

Doulas should not be forced to seek out only affluent clients and/or take on too many births each month, just to survive financially. Burnout is extremely common in this field, and unsustainable wages and ungodly hours is a huge part of it. Low-income Mainers should not be excluded from the incredible support that doulas offer, especially when the disparities in perinatal health outcomes are stratified along socioeconomic, geographic, and racial lines.

If Maine wants a future, we must invest in well-being for birthing people and infants, full stop. LD 1523 takes a significant step in the right direction. Doulas and pregnant Mainers—and our collective future—are worth it.

Please vote Ought To Pass on LD 1523.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Vaughan

Cait Vaughan, Birthing Solidarity
www.birthingsolidarity.org