



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

My name is Meg Whithed, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Maine Doula Coalition in support of ***LD 1523, An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services.***

The Maine Doula Coalition is a statewide, volunteer-led organization committed to expanding access to doula services and building a sustainable doula workforce.

Doulas are trained, **non-medical** professionals who provide continuous emotional, informational, and physical support throughout pregnancy, labor, and postpartum. Doula services include care around prenatal and postpartum education, continuous labor support, infant loss, lactation, community referrals, and culturally aligned care. Because we build close, sustained relationships with clients, doulas are uniquely positioned to witness the full spectrum of challenges Maine families are facing.

Maine is facing significant strain on its perinatal care infrastructure. Lack of access to doula support falls heaviest on rural, low-income and marginalized communities. Disparities to access include workforce shortages, mounting hospital OB unit closures, long travel times, and a lack of culturally competent care models.

Findings from 2023's Maine Doula Workforce Assessment shed light on the urgency of expanding coverage to ensure growth and sustainability of a struggling workforce:

- **More than 53%** of doulas surveyed had served MaineCare enrollees and/or uninsured clients in the past.
- **28.8%** of doulas surveyed expressed they work with families who are more affluent, middle and upper class. Many indicated that this is because these individuals can afford their services.
- **68.9%** of doula respondents reported serving a family for free at some point in their career.

These findings reflect a system in which doulas are filling critical care gaps but lack adequate infrastructure or support to do so sustainably.

Ongoing hospital closures and limited care options fuel burnout and financial instability for a struggling workforce that are supporting families that have fewer and fewer perinatal choices. Without MaineCare coverage, the people most impacted by these health disparities are also the **least** likely to receive doula support. **While doulas are non-clinical care providers, we are also often the first line of contact for families when questions or concerns arise.** Expansion of MaineCare coverage is a critical step toward addressing a much broader set of systemic challenges facing families in Maine.

The Maine Doula Coalition urges you to vote Ought To Pass on LD 1523.

Sincerely,

Meg Whithed

Maine Doula Coalition

www.mainedoulacoalition.org