



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002  
(207) 287-1400  
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

## **Deqa Dhalac**

10 Red Oak Drive, Apt. 2A  
South Portland, ME 04106  
Phone: 207- 553-0303  
[Deqa.Dhalac@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Deqa.Dhalac@legislature.maine.gov)

April 17, 2025

*Testimony of Representative Deqa Dhalac presenting*

## **LD 1523, An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Deqa Dhalac, and I am proud to represent House District 120, which includes part of South Portland. I am here today to present **LD 1523, An Act to Improve Perinatal Care Through Expanded Access to Doula Services.**

LD 1523 defines “doula services” and establishes MaineCare reimbursement for those services, including support during childbirth, along with four prenatal and four postnatal visits. As outlined in the bill, doula services refer to the nonclinical physical, emotional and informational support provided by trained professionals throughout pregnancy, labor, birth and postpartum. This includes guidance on pregnancy health, childbirth, infant feeding and newborn care.

It’s important to highlight the unique role doulas play in the perinatal care continuum. Doulas are not clinical providers; rather, they complement the care provided by licensed medical professionals. Their presence offers an additional layer of support, especially critical during a period that can be physically, emotionally and mentally demanding. Their guidance has been shown to improve maternal and infant health outcomes.

Currently, doula services are not reimbursed by private or public insurance. This makes access to such care possible only for those who can afford to pay out-of-pocket. As a result, many Mainers, particularly those covered by MaineCare, which accounts for 38% of all births in the state, are left without this vital support.

A crucial component of LD 1523 is the creation of a Doula Advisory Committee. This committee would be made up of practicing doulas and would collaborate with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of MaineCare Services to guide the implementation and oversight of this program. Including doulas in this process ensures the policy

is responsive to the realities and needs of the communities it is designed to serve. Simply put: who is better to inform this work than those who do it every day?

A few additional points to consider:

By passing this bill, Maine would join 21 other states that have already implemented or are in the process of implementing Medicaid coverage for doula services. Learning from their successes and challenges has directly informed the language and structure of LD 1523.

This bill was developed in direct collaboration with practicing doulas across the state. Many of these dedicated professionals will speak to you today, and their firsthand experience has helped to shape a proposal that is both practical and impactful.

It's also important to note that LD 1523 builds on years of groundwork and aligns with state and federal priorities. Doula access is a recommended strategy in the Maine DHHS Perinatal and Infant Health Priority, the Maine CDC's 2023 Maternal, Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Annual Report, in addition to the Racial Disparities in Prenatal Access in Maine Report that was under LD 1113 in 2021.

Furthermore, Maine recently received a ten-year federal grant to implement the Transforming Maternal Health (TMaH) model, which requires MaineCare to cover doula services by the third year. While the grant supports DHHS and OMS in building the model, the state must establish the reimbursement funding—this bill is a key mechanism to meet that obligation.

As we know, the United States faces a growing maternal healthcare crisis and has the highest maternal mortality rate among developed nations. While LD 1523 alone won't solve every facet of this crisis, it addresses a foundational gap: the lack of accessible, high-quality prenatal and postpartum support. Doula care is a proven, evidence-based intervention that can help improve birth experiences and outcomes, especially for marginalized and underserved communities.

I spent several years working as a doula, where I had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the profound impact personalized support can have on new mothers. Throughout their pregnancies, I offered both emotional and physical care during one of the most meaningful times in their lives: welcoming their newborn into the world.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to answering any questions you may have, and I know you'll hear more today from those who can speak directly to the profound impact of this bill.

# Why are DOULAS VITAL to Maine?



- A doula is a trained, non-medical care worker who provides continuous physical, emotional and educational support during pregnancy, labor and postpartum.
- Doulas are important members of the care team, particularly in states like Maine where access to services may be limited.
- “Evidence shows that continuous (doula) support can decrease the risk of Cesarean, the use of medications for pain relief, and the risk of a low five minute Apgar score. Labor support also increases satisfaction and the chance of a spontaneous vaginal birth” - Evidence Based Birth
- A well supported doula workforce and increased access to doula care for pregnant people in Maine may help improve perinatal outcomes in the state.
- Incorporating doulas is cited as a strategy for improving perinatal care by the Maine Perinatal and Infant Health Priorities Summary, the 2023 MFIMR Annual Review and the LD1113: Racial Disparities in Prenatal Access in Maine report.

