

Good morning. I am here to tell you that I support LD 1357. Birthgivers need additional support after childbirth, and this bill will provide access to the specific care they need to thrive after the birth of their babies.

Too many people are just surviving after giving birth, and the statistics speak for themselves. Rates of postpartum mood disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and OCD, are as high as one in five birthgivers in some demographics. Up to 48% of birthgivers in the USA report their birth experience as traumatic, affecting their lives and relationships for years if the symptoms remain untreated. I don't know the statistics of pelvic floor dysfunction, but as a woman, I can say I always assumed that peeing myself would likely be a normal part of life after giving birth because *so many* women talked about it as I grew up.

I gave birth to my son in June of last year. In my training as a doula, I learned about the value of pelvic floor physical therapy in preparation for birth and for healing after birth. Even though my insurance did not cover a cent of my therapy, the \$780 that I spent was 100% worth the money. What did this mean for me? I had two appointments before giving birth, focusing on exercises to relax my pelvic floor muscles, which can expedite labor and reduce the trauma to those tissues during birth. I diligently engaged in my exercises, and my labor was atypically short for a first child, and I experienced no perineal tearing at all. The fact that I did not tear accelerated my healing in those early weeks. I had four appointments after giving birth. My therapist gave me gentle exercises during the early postpartum days and more challenging exercises as my evaluations confirmed that I was gaining strength. Because of her expertise, I was able to heal my core faster than I would have been able to on my own. My son is just 10 months old as I

read this, and although my body isn't perfectly normal every day, I feel like I am in control of my systems—my systems are not in control of me.

In 2004 and again in 2014, I tore my left ACL. My insurance did not hesitate to cover therapy before *and* after my surgeries. What is different about the pelvic floor? When our body's tissues experience trauma, they must be rehabilitated in order to function properly.

Normal pelvic floor function does not include urinating when we cough or sneeze or the prolapse of our pelvic organs. Additionally, a new parent should not be overwhelmed with constant worry, anxiousness, or feelings of self-doubt. Imagine how many people, who must return to work just six weeks after giving birth, are suffering from incontinence, depression, and other issues. We must make postpartum care accessible to Maine families.

We can look to other nations for the precedents they have set around postpartum care. The implications of this basic care mean that millions of people can not only survive, but *thrive* after giving birth. When parents thrive, children thrive, and that outcome speaks for itself.

As a mother, as a birth worker, and as a Maine woman, I thank you for your time on this critical matter.

Alayna Marchessault (she/her)
Falmouth, ME