

THE GENERAL COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

Witness before the

Joint Committee on Public Health: Sexual and Women's Health; Pharmacy-related Issues

MOTHER Lab

June 10, 2021

Re: Bill H.2372/S.1475: *An Act relative to Medicaid coverage for doula services*

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Decker, Chairwoman Comerford, Vice-Chairwoman Moran, Vice-Chairman Murray.

We are representatives and members of Maternal Outcomes for Translational Health Equity Research (M.O.T.H.E.R) Lab housed at Tufts University School of Medicine and founded by Dr. Amutah-Onukagha. It is an exceptional honor to submit a testimony for such a distinguished panel and such an important cause. On behalf of the MOTHER Lab, we want to thank the Members of this Joint Committee for the sustained support on the public health front and for having this hearing today. Additionally, we want to thank Representatives Liz Miranda of Boston and Lindsay N. Sabadosa of Northampton for proposing Bill H.2372/S.1475: *An Act relative to Medicaid coverage for doula services*

MOTHER lab's mission is to "address and eradicate inequities Black women face, through research, advocacy, and mentorship by confronting and dismantling the system that enables and perpetuates racism for Black women who give birth."^[1] As most of us call Massachusetts our home, we engage with the community and stay abreast of policy on maternal health. We are writing to express clear support of coverage of doula care services through Medicaid.

Doulas provide vital support during the entire pregnancy and delivery process, and there is an abundance of literature that shows that having a doula present can actively mitigate negative birth outcomes such as unplanned, non-medically necessary C-sections, low birth weight, and overall maternal mortality^[2,3,4,5]. Recent literature indicates that Black women are 3-4 times more likely to experience pregnancy related deaths and more severe maternal health complications in comparison to white women. The proposed bill would give women far greater emotional and informational support not only during delivery but in improving their prenatal and postnatal care. Preventable-pregnancy related deaths must be eliminated and the utilization of doulas has resulted in shorter delivery times, greater rates of initiation of breastfeeding in women and an overall decrease in pregnancy-related complications with fewer caesarean

sections performed in the delivery room ^[6]. We have recently published an article showcased on the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence (DCADV website to further substantiate our position), which can be found here:

<https://dcadv.org/blog/centering-the-role-of-doulas-in-the-fight-to-save-black-mothers.html> .

Every mother must be saved and the coverage of Medicaid would allow for greater equity in access to all women, especially marginalized and underserved communities that desperately need emotional, psychosocial and physical support. This has only been exacerbated by COVID-19 where women feel more isolated and alone than ever.

Massachusetts has made significant advances in improving maternal health outcomes. We are enormously grateful for the opportunity to raise awareness on this inequitable issue. We have brought light to the present issue: Medicaid coverage of doula services to reduce pregnancy-related deaths. Massachusetts is at a critical juncture, with the opportunity to intervene and address this issue. Continued dedication to eradicating the preventable loss of infant life can and will help propel us into a more equitable and just Massachusetts.

Thank you, Chairwoman Decker, Chairwoman Comerford, Vice-Chairwoman Moran, Vice-Chairman Murray, and Members of the Committee.

Signed,

MOTHER Lab

Dr. Ndidiyama Amutah-Onukagha

Dr. Vanessa Nicholson

Eimaan Anwar

Leah Franklin

Mansi Rana

Sereena Jivraj

Abena Asare

Siwaar Abouhala

Iman Ali

Yoann Sophie Antoine

Elizabeth Bolarinwa
Keri Carvalho
Lauren Cohen
Shubhecchha Dhaurali
Ebunoluwa Falade
Paige Feyok
Abibatu Giwa-Osagie
Rachel Jackson
Anna Kheyfets
Marwah Kiani
Blessing Lawrence
Dara Lewis
Inricka Liburd
Pegah Maleki
Brenna Miller
Allison Moky
Nichole Moore
Kelechi Offor
Divine Ogieva
Heather Olden
Gabby Ruiz
Radhika Sharma
Shantiera Taylor
Beverly Udegbe
Dr. Bathsheba Wariso
Melissa Wu

-
- [1] "M.O.T.H.E.R. Lab Mission." Maternal Outcomes for Translational Health Equity Research (M.O.T.H.E.R.) Lab, last modified in 2020, <https://motherlab.org/about-2/>
- [2] American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (2014). *Safe Prevention of the Primary Cesarean Delivery*.
<https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/obstetric-care-consensus/articles/2014/03/safe-prevention-of-the-primary-cesarean-delivery>
- [3] Hodnett, E. & Osborn, R. (1989). Effects of Continuous Intrapartum Professional Support on Childbirth Outcomes. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 12(5), 289-297.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.4770120504>
- [4] Kennell, J., Klaus, M., McGrath, S., Robertson, S., & Hinkley, C. (1991). Continuous Emotional Support During Labor in a US Hospital: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of American Medical Association*, 265(17), 2197-2201. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.1991.03460170051032>
- [5] McGrath, S.K., & Kennell, J.H. (2008). A Randomized Controlled Trail of Continuous Labor Support for Middle-class Couples: Effect on Cesarean Delivery Rates. *Birth*, 35(2), 92-97.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1523-536X.2008.00221.x>
- [6] Gruber, Kenneth J., Susan H. Cupito, and Christina F. Dobson. 2013. "Impact Of Doulas On Healthy Birth Outcomes". *The Journal Of Perinatal Education* 22 (1): 49-58. doi:10.1891/1058-1243.22.1.49.