



**TESTIMONY OF:**

Erin Ryan  
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**IN SUPPORT OF:**

Senate Bill 328  
*Require Medicaid to cover doula services*  
Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee  
September 22, 2020

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Antonio, and distinguished members of the Ohio Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of Senate Bill 328, regarding Medicaid coverage of doula services.

My name is Erin Ryan and I serve as the Managing Director of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network, a coalition of nearly 40 organizations working collaboratively to advocate for public policy solutions that build economic opportunity for women and families. We are united by a collective vision: an Ohio in which all women, particularly women of color and low-income women, have the resources to thrive and the ability to live economically secure, safe, and healthy lives.

The right to access quality, affordable, and culturally competent health care is fundamental to our mission as an organization, and this shaped our interest in testifying today in support of Ohio's Senate Bill 328. This legislation would expand Medicaid coverage to include doula services, addressing the current inequalities that exist in the services covered by the state's Medicaid program and ultimately aiming to improve maternal health outcomes, particularly for Black mothers.

Nationally, Medicaid covers more than half of births, playing a critical role in maternal care and health outcomes for babies. When mothers can access the crucial support and services they need throughout their pregnancy and delivery, it can help support stronger health outcomes for mom and baby. However, the state of Ohio fails to provide Medicaid coverage for doula services, putting these services out of reach for many women who want and need to access them.

In recent years, maternal mortality rates in Ohio have been on a progressive rise. Between 2012 and 2016, a report released by the Ohio Department of Health found that 57 percent of the pregnancy related deaths in the state could have been prevented. In addition, the data found that Black mothers are two and half times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white mothers.<sup>1</sup> These disparities in maternal health outcomes for Black women can be attributed to racial disparities in access to and quality of care, discrimination and implicit bias in the health care system experienced before, during, and after pregnancy, and stress and trauma associated with structural and institutional racism.

Doula services provide resources that effectively address both infant mortality and mother morbidity, especially for Black mothers across Ohio. Previous programs created to address infant mortality and morbidity have not attempted to consider the experiences of women disproportionately affected by adverse pregnancy outcomes. Black mothers in particular face specific racial disparities through their pregnancy, during birth, and postpartum that doula services are able to directly address and correct.

Oftentimes, Black mothers need additional advocates when communicating their needs to their doctors or healthcare providers, as systemic health disparities and biases have put Black women's health and lives at risk for centuries. Across academic articles, studies, and shared stories of women, there is a common thread: Black women's concerns are frequently dismissed or downplayed during their pregnancy, leading to severe consequences. Doulas are able to provide needed additional support, create a more supportive environment during delivery, and make the experience of pregnancy much less difficult for the mothers rightfully advocating for their own lives and the lives of their children. During the coronavirus pandemic, the risk of adverse maternal health outcomes is even higher due to increased health risks and changes in protocols and policies at hospitals.

Improving access and affordability to beneficial services, such as doulas, for pregnant women will directly address the health disparities endured by all women, particularly Black mothers. There is no one solution to address the maternal mortality crisis we are facing, however, Senate Bill 328 is critical in the efforts to improve the health outcomes of Ohio mothers, along with proactive policy solutions such as paid family and medical leave.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 328. I am available to answer any questions by email at [ryan@innovationohio.org](mailto:ryan@innovationohio.org).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/local/half-ohio-pregnancy-related-deaths-preventable-report-shows/H6ImOmNoil8uf4vPrfPWBP/>

