



**State Representative Paula Hicks-Hudson
Ohio House District 44
House Bill 611 Sponsor Testimony**

Chairman Brinkman, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Boggs, and members of the House Insurance Committee, thank you for the opportunity for Representative Crawley and I to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 611, which will allow Medicaid to reimburse for doula services. I will be speaking on the sub bill which provides technical changes as well creates an advisory board and outlines their duties.

Doulas are birth workers who provides health education, advocacy, physical, emotional, and nonmedical support for pregnant and postpartum persons before, during, and after childbirth; otherwise known as the perinatal period. Doulas provide this critical support in navigating the healthcare space for women during their pregnancy and childbirth. This time period is one of high stress, when women’s health is at greater risk.

The bill outlines the services doulas can provide including prenatal and postpartum visits, birth support, providing reliable communication, assistance in finding needed health and social services and related administrative tasks. The Medicaid program shall determine the reimbursement but can cover the cost up to \$2,500 per pregnancy.

To be eligible for Medicaid reimbursement, the doula must have valid certificate issued by doula certification organization, at least 60 hours of training including attendance of pregnancy related classes and instruction in culture competency, and positive references from a birth mother and licensed health professional.

The bill creates a doula advisory board to provide general advice, guidance and recommendations to the Department of Medicaid on its coverage of doula services. The advisory board shall verify and approve an organization as a black-led community-based public health organization who can train doulas and establish a state doula registry. The bill creates parameters on who can sit on the advisory board but shall ensure that representation comes from communities most impacted by negative maternal and infant health outcomes and prioritize individuals who provide direct service experience. The bill specifies the board should be 40 percent doulas, and 40 percent public health officials, physicians, nurses and social workers.

Rep. Crawley will elaborate further for the need of this bill. Doulas provide mothers the support they need to have a healthier pregnancy. Ohio women and babies are dying due to pregnancy and childbirth. Black women and babies are dying at a much higher rate than white Ohioans. Many of these deaths are preventable and the General Assembly must address this crisis.