



Dear Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Antonio and Members of the House Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee,

As a first time mom, my doula duo were the champions I needed. They helped me advocate for myself when I felt my medical provider wasn't listening to me; and when I decided to switch providers in my third trimester, they helped me to find a midwife whose philosophy of care aligned with my wants and needs. My delivery did not go as planned, but the presence of my doula brought peace to the situation. She calmly guided me through stretches and breathing exercises and answered my family's questions with patience and grace. In the midst of rapid changes and adjustments, having a doula was reassurance that my transition to motherhood didn't have to be a difficult one. It is an experience that I want every pregnant person to have.

In our state, health disparities abound. We consistently rank amongst the worse in the nation for maternal and infant health outcomes. As a Black woman giving birth in Ohio, I knew that the odds were not in my favor; that neither my graduate degree from Case Western Reserve University nor my professional experience as a public health practitioner would serve as a protective barrier. I knew that while navigating a healthcare system rampant with institutionalized racism and an ever-growing record of Black patients treated poorly and outright harmed, that I would need reinforcement to feel seen, heard, and safe. Doulas were an invaluable component of my prenatal care.

Every pregnant Ohioan deserves the option to choose their own, personal advocate. According to a recent conversation with my former doula, the average cost of service for a private client is in the range of \$800, making care unaffordable to most. While there are programs that offer free or sliding scale fees, these are often limited to specific geographic regions. If I was not a resident of Cleveland I would not have qualified for the program through which I received free doula care.

I don't believe our reproductive options should be limited by our income or address, but that every person should be able to access and choose the care they want. Given that over half of the births in Ohio are financed by Medicaid¹, requiring Medicaid coverage of doula services is a real step towards addressing health disparities and achieving health equity. I fully support S.B. 328 and am grateful that Senators Maharath and Kunze are centering the needs of their constituents.

Sincerely,
Ashley Underwood, MPH
Cleveland, OH

References

1. Births Financed by Medicaid. Kaiser Family Foundation website. [shorturl.at/gCIM](https://www.kff.org/shorturl.at/gCIM). Published December 2019. Accessed June 2020.