

Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and Members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee – thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on H.B. 496.

My name is Liz Susong, and I am local to Columbus. I attended Ohio State for both my undergraduate and graduate degrees. I am the mother of a three-year-old and a one-year-old, and I had the pleasure of utilizing Certified Professional Midwifery Care for both pregnancies. For my first birth, I had a non-emergency transfer from my home to the hospital, and my second birth was a straight-forward home birth.

When I first became pregnant, I did what most people do and looked to see what my insurance covered. I initiated care at a large university hospital in Cincinnati, where I lived at the time. My appointments there were pretty nondescript. I showed up; we went through the motions. I happened to meet a few colleagues at the University of Cincinnati where I worked who had home births with this awesome collective of midwives, Women's Wisdom, owned by Pam Bell. I was so intrigued by the idea of birthing at home; I couldn't get my mind off it. I knew I wanted an unmedicated birth because of the many well-researched benefits and I liked the idea of being in a familiar, comforting setting without the pressure of pain relief drugs or the sterility of a hospital room. I pitched it to my husband. He was hesitant. After meeting the midwives, he got on board, but our families were nervous. Fast forward and my mom is here proudly supporting me today.

My prenatal appointments were fantastic. They completely changed my standards and desires in terms of healthcare. The midwives invited me to take an active role in my health and pregnancy; I became educated on nutrition for the first time ever; I finally tackled my life-long migraines. I was not a passive victim to the state of pregnancy; I felt empowered and energized, ready not only for the powerful act of birth, but also for all that followed – breastfeeding, sleepless nights, staying mentally well while becoming the mother to a helpless infant. The midwives mothered me into mothering.

My first birth didn't go as planned. I was in labor for, well, ever. Eventually, Pam recommended that I transfer to the hospital. The transfer was not an emergency. It's rare for home birth clients to transfer – almost all do it for pain relief or to avoid exhaustion – emergency transfers are few and far between. Thankfully, I had a seamless transfer because Pam and her team had a good relationship with two OBs who were willing to see home birth clients and were familiar with the particulars of my situation. I delivered my daughter with an awesome OB, and my midwife was right by my side the whole time. We know based on looking at other countries that integrated care between OBs and midwives provides the best birth outcomes, and that was exactly my experience.

My birth looked a bit hectic on paper – some might even say traumatic – but with the nonstop support of my midwives and doula, I was on cloud nine and said that night that I was ready to do it all over again. I know so many women who had less bizarre, more routine births than I did who left feeling far more traumatized, fearful, and small. It's extremely common. I feel like the luckiest mom because having the chance to birth with the support of midwives was truly a

magnificent, life-changing experience. I have been volunteering my time and energy since to give back to the midwives who cared for me, and I'll continue to pay it forward as long as I can.

Oh, my second birth was a beautiful, boring 4-hour home birth in the tub under the lights of the Christmas tree. I caught my own baby with my midwife by my side.

I know so many people who long for birth stories like mine, but they are more risk averse. They're too scared to go outside the system; insurance doesn't cover it, they won't have access to routine birth medications; how do they know whether the midwife is really a safe person? They end up prioritizing what they perceive as safety for their baby and doing things the "normal" and socially supported way, and they cross their fingers that they won't get too beat up in the process. This breaks my heart because I believe that the way we feel during our births is the way we begin our mothering journey and sets the stage for how we connect (or don't) with our children.

I support H.B 496 because it legitimizes midwifery care by providing licensing standards and accountability for midwives. It empowers midwives to work with insurance providers and access ultrasounds, labs, and routine medications. It allows midwifery care to be more "normal" and certainly increases the perception of safety. People will continue to seek alternatives to hospital birth for many reasons – less exposure to COVID, a desire to have an unmedicated birth experience, or the terrifying statistics for Women of Color and the fact that they are four times as likely to die giving birth *at the hospital*. People will seek out midwives, and H.B. 496 enables them to do so in a safe and socially supported way.

This is why I am in support of H.B. 496. Thank you.