

Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chairman Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson and Distinguished Members of the Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee thank you for allowing me to testify in Opposition of House Bill 496.

I am opposed to mandatory midwifery licensure because Ohio families would lose their current rights to birth where they want, with whatever birth provider they choose, and the ability to control what happens during their attended births. I have had two homebirths in Ohio, following my oldest child born via cesarean. Attached is a picture of my youngest child, born at home in June 2021. In the past 5 years I have been part of a strong community of local Dayton homebirthers and heard many birth stories. There are hundreds of homebirthers per one Ohio midwife and I believe the issue of licensing midwives affects us most of all.

Currently Ohio families have the right to hire any midwife they want, regardless of licensing or credentials. The birthing mother is free to choose homebirth and a provider that is a great fit for them. There is an interview process for both the midwife and family. It is a collaborative agreement based on trust and respect. This allows a mother to decide to have her baby at home regardless of one-size-fits-all state regulations that could “risk her out” of homebirth. With licensed midwives, the decision to legally birth at home is not made by either mother or midwife.

Many women choose to homebirth in order to stay out of the medical system due to past birth trauma, personal beliefs, and/or because they want to control their birthing environment. It is imperative to keep midwives in Ohio that are NOT integrated into the medical system! HB496 would regulate all midwives in Ohio, except certain ones that qualify for the vague religious exemption. Keeping midwifery licensure optional for all midwives and homebirthers is more than just giving certain people groups the care they are accustomed to. Keeping midwifery licensure optional results in women retaining their current right to choose who they birth at home with. Mandatory licensure results in women losing their right to choose and giving that control over to the state of Ohio, medical professionals, insurance companies, and the board of nursing (or a similar board). It also forces the women whose midwives/doctors risk out of homebirth to birth in the hospital, under the medical system they wanted to avoid. Simply giving birth in an American hospital has a 31% chance of resulting in cesarean. Ohio doesn't need midwives fully integrated and under the regulation of the medical system. Ohio needs to preserve the rights of families to choose whichever birth attendant they want.

Licensed midwives are bound by law to make executive decisions regarding what happens during the births they attend. The rules for how licensed midwives operate during labor are decided on by whichever governing state department oversees midwifery licensure. HB496 would put the board of nursing in charge of Ohio midwives. This might seem like a fitting choice, considering there are Nurse-Midwives in Ohio that work at medical centers, seemingly blending the careers of nurses and midwives. In reality, the nurses in charge of deciding how homebirth midwives operate have never attended or likely seen a homebirth. HB496 would create an “advisory committee” containing a few intentionally selected, certified midwives (along with other healthcare professionals) that would suggest things to the Ohio nursing board. The power would ultimately lie with a nursing board that has no context or experience in the field they are regulating. The birthing family would lose control over what happens during and after their births.

Holly Christensen-founder of Ohio Friends Of Midwives-recently wrote in the Beacon Journal, *Protecting Community Midwifery For All Ohioans*, "There is no reason for Ohio's legislature to endanger one population in an effort to help another population. For as long as Ohio has been a state, community midwives have been attending birthing women with great success." Ohio can have licensed midwives for those who choose while still preserving the rights of Ohio families. Nothing short of completely optional licensure for Ohio midwives is acceptable-no strings attached!

I urge you to vote NO on House Bill 496.

Thank you, Carly Baker
4525 Creekview Drive
Middletown, Ohio, 45044