

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.

If after today you are still inclined to vote “yes” on House Bill 496, I would urge you to attend a homebirth as well as a hospital birth and see for yourself the difference in care.

I personally delivered both of my children at home with a traditional midwife. The time she spent with me building a relationship, counseling me on nutrition, guiding me to learn and to take control of the health of my family is priceless. Instead of being forced into the passive role of a “patient,” I was forged into an active participant in the birth of my children, left wondrously empowered instead of traumatized.

As a certified birth doula I have supported parents through labor and birth in various homes and hospitals both in metropolitan and rural communities, as well as at the largest freestanding birth center in the US. I have witnessed, time and again, the very system that is supposed to “save” families fail to provide adequate care and, in some cases, leave families scarred and traumatized simply because providers were following “protocol.”

When a woman chooses an obstetrician she is not told what their personal c-section rate is; she is not told the rates of maternal/fetal mortality and morbidity of clients within their care. She is not given an outline of their training, nor a list of personal and professional references to further vet their competencies. When hiring a home birth midwife – whether certified professional or traditional/direct entry – a woman can ask for all these things and more to decide whom she trusts to care for her family.

Currently, parents giving birth in Ohio are free to choose to birth wherever and with whomever they wish. Mandatory licensure results in women losing their birth rights and giving that control over to the state of Ohio, medical professionals, insurance companies, and the board of nursing. Mandatory licensure also means that women with pregnancies which are considered “high risk” will be risked out of delivering at home with a qualified attendant and forced to deliver in the hospital system they intended to avoid. It is my fear that this “risking out” of home birth will cause an unprecedented increase in unattended births in our state – which will result in many more adverse outcomes for mothers and infants. I have personally heard numerous friends say that if House Bill 496 passes they would rather give birth alone than step foot in a labor and delivery ward again. Just because a woman is pregnant with multiple babies, has had prior c-sections, or has a baby in the breech position does NOT mean that birth has become a medical emergency. It simply means that she needs to be supported and cared for by a qualified attendant – which can and should include traditional midwives.

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. Please preserve our birth rights; please vote no on House Bill 496.