

November 29, 2022

Dear Representative Manchester and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to look at this issue of regulating Ohio's midwives. As a recipient of excellent care by midwives in Ohio, I want to share my story and how this pending law would affect me and my family.

After 9 years of infertility and multiple losses, I had my first child in 2012. She was born naturally at a hospital with the aid of a doula we had hired to assist us through the natural stages of birth. Our doula was finishing her midwifery training at the time, and oh how I wish in hindsight I could have stayed home to have her instead of having her at the hospital.

You see, hospitals are very regulated places. There I had to endure laying on my back during excruciating back labor while they asked me my medical history, despite having tried to give them this information weeks ahead of time, and having given it to them the night before when I was checked there previously. I also had to endure them struggling to get an IV Lock in me just in case something were happening. While in active hard labor the nurse had to have her arms uncomfortably around me for about 40 minutes while I labored on my hands and knees as the most comfortable position I could get in on the cold hospital floor while hooked up to monitors. I finally asked her in the minute between contractions if everything was ok? To which she stated that yes, everything was fine, she just needed to get the readings to show on the paper.

Despite, my first baby being my smallest by a pound or more she is the only one I suffered a tear while giving birth. This was because I was horizontal in a bed instead of being allowed to use the natural force of gravity. All in all, I was in labor with her for 60 hours start to finish with contractions every 6 minutes or less. It was long, and without the aid of doula to guide me and stay at home for most of those hours I likely would have had a very different outcome than the natural and vaginal birth that I so desired.

I did go on to have my next 4 children in the comfort of my home. At home I was able to labor naturally and work with my body, not the regulations. I was able to move where and when and how I needed to do so. You see, because birth is a natural process, we are able to use our natural instincts to know what will work best for us to relax and allow what is natural to happen. This does need education and support and that is what a Midwife does. They lovingly support the parents during a birth. They encourage when labor gets just too hard during transition. They monitor things to make sure that mom and baby are doing well. They advise when changes may need to be made. They don't regulate or control. They assist. And that is exactly what I have needed during birth and what so many desperately need during the process of birth.

Regulating midwives, and by means of that who can have access to home births, will cause harm to many families in Ohio, including mine. My understanding of the law in its current form could possibly deny me access to a homebirth midwife. It could do this by reducing the number of midwives available

to perform births. In my current area of Jefferson County, there is already a large shortage of practicing OBs at both of our local hospitals (one of which is in WV, but it is the closest other hospital). There are also not many midwives, but most are about an hour to 2 hours away and make the journey work for many families in my area. More and more families in our area are having to travel to Pittsburgh, the nearest large city for prenatal and quality birth care due to these shortages. Losing our midwives would increase the burden on our area.

This burden would also lead to many more families choosing unassisted birthing options over skilled midwifery care. These reasons would be both due to a lack of availability in midwives and the likely increased financial burdens that their trainings and licensures would require them to charge. As someone who once was faced with having to look long and hard at the option of an unassisted birth versus delivering at hospital where I was treated, while in labor, with contempt and utter disregard as a human, I can tell you this a choice that families do not want to have to face. I chose that day to leave the hospital where I was told they didn't care if I died, and that's a direct quote, because I did not want one their protocols that the doctor had okayed. I was fortunate to find the most amazing midwife ever THAT day who came and delivered my healthy baby boy.

Families deserve the choice of who helps them through the natural process of birth and where they choose to birth. It is not a decision that families, or midwives, take lightly. Please preserve the freedom of families, not boards, to make these decisions and to keep our families safe.

Respectfully,

Crystal Hatcher

Wintersville, Ohio, Jefferson County