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House Bill 142 Sponsor Testimony (As prepared)
Senate Health Committee

Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity for us to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 142, which will allow Medicaid to reimburse for doula services.

Doulas are birth workers who provide health education, advocacy, and physical, emotional, and nonmedical support for pregnant and postpartum persons before, during, and after childbirth, otherwise known as the perinatal period. Two-thirds or 67% of pregnancy-related deaths in Ohio from 2008-18 occurred during the postpartum period (up to 365 days after the end of pregnancy).¹ Medicaid covers over 50 percent of the 138,000 plus births in Ohio each year however, these vital services are not covered by Medicaid. Doula organizations do their best to provide affordable services to those who benefit most from their services. However, to do this and ensure that doulas are receiving a livable wage and compensation, many doula organizations are absorbing the cost of the services.

Access to continuous labor support from a doula is especially vital for birthing people of color. Black women experience higher rates of poor birth outcomes, including higher rates of Cesarean, preterm birth, low birth weight, and infant death. Studies show that significant racial disparities in birth outcomes continue to exist even after accounting for factors like the pregnant person's income, education, marital status, tobacco/ alcohol use, and insurance coverage. In other words, health and social factors alone can't explain the higher rates of poor birth outcomes among Black people. Then what does explain the health inequity? Researchers have proposed that African Americans are subjected to individual, institutional, and other forms of discrimination throughout their lives; these experiences build on each other and are uniquely stressful, and the increased stress can negatively impact pregnancy outcomes.²

Also cited in the Ohio Department of Health's PAM-R report, Black women died at a rate more than two and a half times that of white women, accounting for 34 percent of pregnancy-related deaths while only making up 17 percent of women giving birth in Ohio.³ In total, 57 percent of pregnancy-related deaths between 2012 and 2016 were preventable.⁴ According to Health Policy Institute of Ohio, only five states have a higher Black infant mortality rate than Ohio. Over the past decade, Ohio's Black-white infant mortality disparity increased by twenty six percent (26%) from 2.2 in 2009 to 2.8 on 2019. Premature birth and its complications are the

¹ A Report on Pregnancy-Associated Deaths in Ohio 2008-2016." Ohio Department of Health

² Dekker, R. (2019, August 12). Evidence on: Doulas.

³ A Report on Pregnancy-Associated Deaths in Ohio 2008-2016." Ohio Department of Health

⁴ *Id.*

largest contributors to infant death in this country and globally. For Black women in Ohio, the preterm birth rate is 49% higher than the rate among all other women. For Black babies, the preterm birth rate is 14.3 whereas white infant mortality rate is 5.1. Along with other investments in infant and maternal mortality and post-partum care, this bill seeks to improve the dismal numbers we are seeing and keep people alive.

High level overview of the bill:

- Creates a five-year pilot program for Ohio's Medicaid Program and the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction
- Doulas participating in the programs will be required to hold a certificate issued by the Ohio Board of Nursing; Medicaid participants must also have a valid provider agreement
- DRC doula services provided to inmates participating in the prison nursery program only
- Doula Advisory Board within the Board of Nursing and Medicaid reporting requirements are included in the bill

House Bill 142 passed out of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee 14-1 and with overwhelmingly bipartisan support from my former colleagues in the Ohio House, 82-3. I implore this committee to also support this vital piece of legislation that will have a transformative impact on the lives of many in our state. The work of doulas can help families identify issues that cause complications that ultimately lead to death, because they are with the families before, during, and after birth. Doulas are especially important when we talk about addressing health disparities and outcomes for pregnant people. Every family deserves to bring a child into this world, safely, with competent and attentive care, and without fear. Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill, I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.