

To the Ohio House Finance Committee,

I am writing to express my profound opposition to the proposed budget provision that would severely limit Medicaid coverage for doula services in Ohio. This provision is not only a disservice to birth workers but an outright attack on the well-being of mothers and infants in our state. It is appalling that, in a time when maternal and infant mortality rates remain unacceptably high, Ohio lawmakers would consider restricting access to a service that has been proven to improve birth outcomes. As a Doula and a person who has utilized the services of Doulas, I cannot in good faith support this provision.

Doulas play a critical role in maternal healthcare, particularly for marginalized communities disproportionately impacted by poor maternal health outcomes. Studies have repeatedly shown that the presence of a doula can reduce the likelihood of cesarean sections, decrease the use of pain medications, and improve overall birth experiences. Most importantly, doula care is associated with lower rates of preterm births and infant mortality. Ohio already struggles with one of the highest infant mortality rates in the nation, particularly among Black mothers and babies. Restricting access to doula care will only worsen these disparities, making it clear that this budget proposal is not about fiscal responsibility but about neglecting the most vulnerable members of our communities.

Beyond the health consequences, this proposal places an undue burden on birth workers. Capping Medicaid reimbursement for doulas at \$500,000 statewide is not just insufficient—it is insulting. At a reimbursement rate of \$1,200 per birth, this budget would cover only 416 births per year across the entire state. This means doulas, who are already underpaid and undervalued, will struggle to make a livable wage. Worse, the arbitrary cap favors births that occur earlier in the fiscal year, creating a system where access to essential birth support is determined not by need, but by the calendar.

Moreover, the process of becoming a state-certified doula is already riddled with barriers, making it inaccessible to many. The certification process is extensive and time-consuming, and Medicaid reimbursement delays further discourage participation as we have already seen. Many doulas have already been waiting for months, if not years, to be recognized by the state, only to now be told that funding for their services will be virtually nonexistent. This policy effectively pushes doulas out of the workforce and deprives pregnant individuals of their right to culturally competent, continuous support.

This decision is an insult to every birthing person and every infant in Ohio. It disregards the extensive research supporting doula care, ignores the realities faced by birth workers, and demonstrates a shameful lack of commitment to maternal and infant health. If Ohio legislators truly care about reducing infant mortality and supporting families, they should be expanding access to doula care, not gutting it.

I urge you to reject this provision and instead invest in meaningful, evidence-based solutions that prioritize the health and dignity of Ohio's mothers and babies.

Sincerely,
Serena Williams, CLC, CD
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