



House Bill 142 – Proponent Testimony
House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee
Nazleen Bharmal, MD, PhD
Associate Chief, Community Health & Partnerships, Cleveland Clinic
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Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Liston and members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 142, which establishes pilot programs for the coverage or provision of doula services. My name is Dr. Nazleen Bharmal, and I am Associate Chief, Community Health & Partnerships at Cleveland Clinic.

The Cleveland Clinic has five birthing hospitals: Fairview Hospital (on the West Side of Cleveland), Hillcrest Hospital (on the East Side of Cleveland), Akron General, Mercy Hospital (in Canton) and Union Hospital (in Tuscarawas County). In high-risk situations, deliveries also occur at Cleveland Clinic's main campus. Our birthing hospitals are ready for anything, including complications.

As providers at Cleveland Clinic, we are dedicated to tackling the serious issue of maternal mortality in Ohio, one that disproportionately affects black women. According to the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), Ohio women died from pregnancy-related causes at a ratio of 14.7 per 100,000 live births from 2008-2016. Currently in Ohio, maternal mortality rates are two to three times greater for black women compared to their white counterparts. Research has showed that incorporating the care from doulas during pregnancy can promote vaginal delivery, prevent Cesarean sections, and result in overall better birth outcomes.

A doula is a professionally trained labor and birth assistant who can provide education and physical and emotional support during labor and birth. Some doulas provide both pre- and post-birth services. When you choose and meet with your doula, you can discuss how she can best help you during labor, birth or postpartum. While doulas are nonclinical professionals, they can be a critical source of physical and emotional support for the mom and her partner during labor, and sometimes during the pregnancy and postpartum period as well. Doulas can coach women during labor with breathing techniques, different positional changes and relaxation strategies during pushing.

Currently, most insurance providers do not cover the costs of doula services, which is why House Bill 142 is so critical. This bill will establish in the Medicaid Program and Department of Rehabilitation and Correction four-year pilot programs for the coverage or provision of doula services, require the Board of Nursing to establish a registry of certified doulas, and establish the Doula Advisory Board within the Board of Nursing. In Ohio, Medicaid covers home visiting programs and certain prenatal services including prenatal vitamins and ultrasounds, which contribute to a successful and healthy pregnancy. Adding doula services to the spectrum of resources covered by Medicaid in Ohio will ensure we improve access and the health of our communities.



Cleveland Clinic is committed to being a partner to you in combating the issue of maternal mortality. We support House Bill 142 and urge the committee to be supportive as well. We thank the bill sponsors, former Representative Erica Crawley, and Representative Tom Brinkman for championing this legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony, and I am available to be contacted with any questions you may have.