

October 28, 2021

Testimony of:
Morgan Foster

In support of:
House Bill 142

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrano, and Ranking Minority Member Liston, and distinguished members of the Ohio House Families, Aging & Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today in support of House Bill 142.

My name is Morgan Foster. Personally, I am an advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Professionally, I work as a Pro Bono Coordinator at the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court, focusing on reuniting families by recruiting volunteer attorneys to help those in need. However, some Cuyahoga County families face irreparable problems/separations, as Cuyahoga County has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the United States.¹ These reasons are why I am personally submitting testimony today in support of House Bill 142.

House Bill 142 would require Medicaid to cover doula services, which have proven to reduce racial disparities in birth outcomes. A doula is a trained, nonmedical professional who provides continuous physical, emotional, and informational support to a woman shortly before, during, and after her pregnancy.

Employing doulas positively affects birth outcomes for mothers and infants, including lower rates of C-sections, epidural use and episiotomies, and higher rates of spontaneous labor (a vaginal delivery that happens on its own, without requiring doctors to use tools to help pull the baby out), and higher Apgar scores (which rate how well the baby is doing after birth).²

Not only does this mean decreased pregnancy risks and increased patient satisfaction, but it also means the use of doula services is very cost-effective. On average, doulas save nearly \$1,000 in reimbursement costs. Currently, 52% of births in Ohio are paid for by Medicaid, and the passage of this bill would have vast financial benefits for the program.

The benefits are clear. That is why a few other states have implemented legislation in which Medicaid will provide reimbursement for doula services. Ohio has an opportunity to join as a leader on this issue. If not, Ohio will remain on the leaderboard for having one of the highest Black infant mortality rates - a shameful designation.

¹ <https://www.firstyearcleveland.org/the-issue>

² https://www.cleveland.com/healthfit/2017/07/cleveland_doulas_fight_black_i.html

According to the Health Policy Institute of Ohio, only five states have a higher Black infant mortality rate than Ohio.³ Over the last decade, Ohio's infant mortality disparity between Black and white infants increased by 26%. For Black women in Ohio, the preterm birth rate is 49% higher than the rate among all other women. These statistics demonstrate the critical need for public policies that address racial disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes. House Bill 142 is a concrete solution that will improve maternal health rates, particularly for Black women and women of color.

One reason more states do not cover doula services is because there is not a standard certification or registration process. Ohio's proposed bill would address this concern by creating this process with the Ohio Board of Nursing, establishing standards and procedures for issuing certificates to doulas. Once implemented, only certified doulas could call themselves such, or face penalty by the Board.

Not only would this lead to accreditation of doula services, but it would also lead to good jobs in Ohio, especially good jobs for women, who have been disproportionately unemployed during this pandemic. There are not enough doulas in the state to assist with every pregnancy. This bill would help build up the profession and lead the nation in creating standards for these services.

For these reasons, I fully support House Bill 142 and ask that you consider supporting it as well. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today. I would be happy to answer any questions over email at morgmfoster@gmail.com.

³ <https://www.healthpolicyohio.org>