



## RESTORING OUR OWN THROUGH TRANSFORMATION

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### **PUBLIC TESTIMONY:**

### **HB 142 - MEDICAID COVERAGE OF DOULA SERVICES**

Good morning, 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.

My name is Jessica Roach, and I serve as Chief Executive Officer of Restoring Our Own Through Transformation - also known as ROOTT. I am joined by my partner Dorian Wingard, who is also the Chief Operations Officer at ROOTT.

For over two years we have been diligent in supporting legislation that can move the needle-of-reform that addresses the health inequities Black families face in our great State that have led to the disproportionate impact of infant and maternal mortality. We remain diligent in our advocacy to establish a medicaid reimbursement for Doula Services. Our testimony today is in support of HB 142, and its recommendation that medicaid fully support and reimburse Perinatal Support Doula services.



ROOTT is a collective of concerned Black families, community members, advocates and interdisciplinary professionals dedicated to decreasing Black maternal and infant mortality in Ohio. Our mission is to comprehensively restore the Black family's collective well-being through collaboration, resource allocation, research and re-empowerment, in a way that meets the needs of Black parents & families, through direct service, policy, advocacy, and education that finally centers the voices and needs of Black families.

What is unique about our organization is that our values drive our full spectrum approach toward reproductive health care, specifically as it pertains to Black families, and our lived experiences. As a result, we have achieved and have been able to maintain a 0% maternal and infant mortality rate since 2017.

ROOTT has been able to achieve such success because we directly address the institutional and structural policies and deficit driven health communications that cause the adverse and disproportionate consequences of maternal and infant mortality. We DO NOT focus merely on the social determinants that have become popular and safe to discuss publicly.

Too often, Black family reproductive justice is co-opted and segregated into a narrow frame of pro-life or pro-choice narratives, which limit conversations and



exclude the Black experience. At ROOTT, our value proposition is clear: **we believe in the right of autonomy, the right to choose how, where, when, and IF we create a family, the right to define family for ourselves, and the basic human right to environments, social structures and institutions that foster safety and self-sustainability within our communities.** Unfortunately, our stance has cost us opportunities at State funding, but despite that, we remain fully supportive of the fair and equitable medicaid reimbursement of Perinatal Support Doula services that target health inequities in Black communities.

You all know the statistics, anecdotes and stories of trauma and loss that have impacted Black families disproportionately, so we will not repeat them in this testimony. What we will reiterate is that Perinatal Support Doulas, specifically, ROOTT Perinatal Support Doulas provide invaluable services not found in mainstream or traditional healthcare engagements. ROOTT's clinically trained Perinatal Support Doulas develop culturally compatible relationships of trust, honesty, and integrity. We are not competitors with medical staff, we do not seek to replace medical doctors, and we are not adversaries. We are advocates and allies as it relates to conveying accurate health information, and addressing stereotypes and biases typically applied to Black maternal health profiles, that directly cause misdiagnoses, pre-mature inductions, and unnecessary surgical births.



ROOTT Perinatal Support Doulas are also instrumental in providing post-partum services, including related screenings, breastfeeding education and counseling and family planning services. Most importantly, ROOTT Perinatal Support Doulas are primary factors in reducing NICU stays, which provide a significant financial savings to our medicaid health system and taxpayers and improve the quality of life for Black families as it relates to the overall health of our children.

Understanding reproductive justice in Black communities means acknowledging and understanding our 400-plus year history of having our reproductive and birthing choices stripped away. To not understand this is to ignore the systemically racist and oppressive practices embedded in our healthcare system that reveal themselves in erroneous healthcare communication and deficient culturally relative services. Our Perinatal Support Doula services provide access to equitable opportunities, safety, and protection.

HB 142 attempts to provide medicaid reimbursement for these services. The proposed bill also seeks to regulate the profession by identifying sanctioned training entities and by creating an advisory board. ROOTT is adamant that both actions cannot be completed in a vacuum and cannot be achieved with the usual appointment of majority white professionals that remain unskilled in serving Black families.



We are clear that race neutral solutions will not correct race specific challenges. Said differently, given the disproportionate impact of infant and maternal mortality on Black communities for a variety of institutional and systemic reasons caused by racism, it is counterintuitive to expect that solutions that ignore this fact will be effective. Therefore, medicaid reimbursement must be comprehensive and reflective of the value of the range of services delivered, with an understanding that a singular approach or rate will not answer the needs of diverse Black families.

HB 142 provides an opportunity to structure and fund this critical service for Black families. ROOTT requests your support of this bill and asks that you demonstrate your care and concern for Black families as you traditionally have for other families in Ohio.