

Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and Members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee – thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 496

My name is Jessica Stieritz. I am a mother of 4 children, two born at home with Certified Professional Midwives, one unmedicated hospital birth with a CNM, and one cesarean with an OB-GYN. I have therefore had a variety of birth experiences and can speak confidently about the unparalleled level of care women and babies receive from a midwifery team in the comfort of their own homes.

I want midwives to be licensed and regulated in the State of Ohio, because I believe that:

1. Homebirths should be more widely recognized as a safe and healthy option for mothers and their newborns in low-risk birthing circumstances, and
2. Mothers and their newborns' safety can be ensured if their midwives are certified to determine when to direct their patients to medical facilities for optimal healthcare, if necessary.

After my eldest son was born via an unmedicated hospital birth 14 years ago, my postpartum hospital experience was miserable. I was exhausted, with constant interruptions making rest impossible and forced to feed my newborn formula before giving me a reasonable opportunity to produce my own milk. I believe this experience contributed to significant postpartum depression, which persisted for months.

When pregnant with my second son a few years later, I started looking for alternatives and found a Certified Professional Midwife and her team. Their care throughout the pregnancy, labor, birth, and postpartum is beyond anything a hospital-based provider can ever offer. Particularly the ability to deliver a healthy baby safely at home, receive undivided attention from a team of care providers, and have an immediate opportunity to rest in my own home, made my postpartum experience the happy, peaceful, and comfortable time it should be. So I delivered my third son at home as well, with another CPM and her team.

Three years ago I found myself expecting again, a fourth baby at age 41. I reached out to my previous CPM to see if I could plan another homebirth. At that point I was hypertensive and on blood pressure medication, and she immediately "risked me out" of a homebirth. This was the right decision. I found an OB-GYN who supported me through a difficult pregnancy with hypertension and gestational diabetes (GD), and my daughter was born 3 weeks early by emergency cesarean, with an APGAR of 2. She spent 6 weeks in the NICU for feeding problems due to the GD, and eventually had a g-tube placed for nutritional supplementation.

I believe that a less educated, less prudent midwife may have permitted me to continue my 4th pregnancy as a planned homebirth, which likely could have resulted in tragedy. If my OB had not followed my baby so closely, with non-stress tests (NSTs) and

biophysical profiles (BPPs) every few days, we could have lost our little girl. I am grateful that my CPM was well-trained and wise enough to know when a homebirth should NOT be an option. I believe that licensure of midwives in Ohio will ensure that more women can trust that their midwives have been properly trained to provide safe care, even if it means telling a client that a homebirth is unwise and they need a more appropriate care provider in a high risk situation.

This is why I am in support of HB 496, because homebirth should be a safe option for all low-risk pregnancies.

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