



November 29th, 2022

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson and members of the Ohio House Families, Aging and Human Services Subcommittee, on behalf of the Buckeye Birth Coalition, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on House Bill 496 this morning. My name is Meghan Nowland, I am a Certified Professional Midwife who practices in Ohio and Kentucky.

I have a Bachelor's of Science in Midwifery from the Midwives College of Utah. I did my training at a birth center in San Antonio for two years and attended births at home and birth center. Since 2014, I have lived in Cincinnati, and I serve on the Kentucky Midwives Advisory Council to the Board of Nursing. In 2019 we passed licensure for midwives in Kentucky and since then the council created new regulations for midwives in Kentucky.

Today, I am here to represent the Buckeye Birth Coalition.

This bill is personal to me not only as a midwife, but as a sister. My younger sister lives in Illinois, and two years ago, she had her first child. She and her husband wanted midwifery care, and because Certified Professional Midwives were not licensed in IL at the time, she had to drive up an hour into Wisconsin for prenatal care. They planned to give birth at a birth center in Wisconsin. They ended up transferring to the hospital during pushing because my niece was having heart rate decelerations. She had a smooth transfer and shortly after she arrived at the hospital she gave birth vaginally to my niece. In October she gave birth to a healthy baby boy at home because in 2021 Illinois passed legislation to license Certified Professional Midwives.

To put it simply, House Bill 496 is good for moms and babies. We know the data show that when midwives are well integrated into the healthcare system it results in improved maternal and infant health outcomes, because midwives have high rates of normal spontaneous vaginal births, and low rates of complications. But my favorite thing about this legislation is how it will boost Ohio's economy. I would venture to say that all of the women who testify today are small business owners. This bill will benefit female entrepreneurs.

The International Confederation of Midwives and World Health Organization agree there is a shortage of about 1 million midwives worldwide, for reasons such as lack of education options and discrimination against women. One of the big reasons affecting midwives in the United Kingdom and in Ohio is midwives graduating and then being unable to use their training due to inappropriate or prohibitive regulations. This legislation will help boost our workforce and provide greater ability for incoming midwives to practice. It will help our students and new midwives be able to find jobs, create jobs, and for our existing midwives to employ Ohio workers.

As sponsor on this legislation, Representative Koehler has worked diligently with a variety of providers and stakeholders to ensure the development process was based on intentional listening and collaboration. In spite of this opportunity at the table, you may continue to hear opposition from some



in our community following two main arguments. One group of opponents will say this piece of legislation would not put in place appropriate guidelines and criteria to encourage access and growth in the midwifery community. My answer to them is that we are all working together to ensure this legislation meets appropriate national, local, and state regulations. This legislation will improve collaboration among midwives and physicians and outcomes for families. We are collaborating to get this right.

Some midwives currently practicing in Ohio who have never had the experience of practicing in a state where midwives are licensed and fully integrated into the healthcare system may also take exception to House Bill 496. These midwives fear this legislation would criminalize their practice and keep them from bringing home food for their families, because midwifery is their livelihood. Instead, the opposite is true. In Texas where I was trained, midwives have been licensed since the early 80s. I saw firsthand how a more formalized integration of midwives into that state's spectrum of health services benefitted the families, the midwives, the economy and the larger healthcare community engaged in the work of providing safe and accessible birth options.

Once again, I thank Representative Koehler for his work in bringing this important legislation seeking to uplift and integrate midwives across the spectrum of our profession in the community of professional caregivers. I also appreciate this committee's careful consideration of House Bill 496, and would urge members to support this bill to help improve birthing outcomes for Ohio families.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify as a proponent this morning. I would be happy to address any questions members may have at this time.