



HB1067 – Doulas – Doula Technical Assistance Advisory Group and Certification

Presented to the Hon. Shane Pendergrass and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee
March 6, 2020 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges members of the Health and Government Operations Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB1067 – Doulas – Doula Technical Assistance Advisory Group and Certification**, sponsored by Delegates Jheanelle Wilkins and Stephanie Smith. Our organization is a proud member of the Reproductive Health Equity Alliance of Maryland (RHEAM), the coalition that brought forth this bill and its Senate companion, SB0914.

Doulas are non-clinical patient advocates who (depending on their scope of practice) support pregnant people throughout their pregnancy, labor and delivery, and postpartum experience. Doula care has been known to increase breast feeding initiation rates and decrease the rate of low birth weight (LBW) babiesⁱ. It is also associated with a 40-minute shorter labor, 9% reduction in pain medication, a 34% reduction in “negative birthing experiences,” and a 28% reduction in cesarean sections. Reducing the need for unnecessary cesarean sections improves maternal morbidity and mortality. Research shows that while “the initial cesarean delivery is associated with some increases in morbidity and mortality, the downstream effects are even greater because of the risks from repeat cesareans in future pregnancies.”ⁱⁱ

HB1067 will improve access to doula care by requiring the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to convene a technical assistance advisory group which will study and make recommendations on issues related to the certification and reimbursement of doulas. The legislation calls for the creation of a statewide doula certification program that is reflective of the advisory group’s recommendations. Unlike other types of maternal and child health specialists such as midwives and nurse midwives, there is no national certifying body for doulas. Maryland Medicaid and other health insurance entities have been clear with advocates that reimbursement for doulas will not be possible until a well-researched certification system has been established.

Coverage of doula care by Medicaid, as well as other public, private, and state-managed health insurance plans, has been recommended by an extensive number of agencies, organizations, and researchers, including the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, March of Dimes, and Black Mamas Matter. We are proud to stand with doulas, as well as other maternal and child health advocates, organizers, legal scholars and policy workers, in support of this bill. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on HB1067**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ⁱ Black Mamas Matter Alliance, & Center for Reproductive Rights. (2018). *Black Mamas Matter: Advancing the Human Right to Safe and Respectful Maternal Health Care*.

ⁱⁱ Bohren MA, Hofmeyr GJ, Sakala C, Fukuzawa RK, Cuthbert A. Continuous support for women during childbirth. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2017 Jul 6;7:CD003766