



Monday, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023

The Honorable Joseline Pena-Melnyk  
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee  
House Office Building, Room 241  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chair Peña-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

*"It feels so redemptive"* - that's what I said after birthing my second son via VBAC in the comfort of my home this past New Years Eve.

In 2021, while pregnant with my first child, I was working with one of Maryland's Licensed Direct Entry midwives. In the last weeks of my pregnancy with my baby in the breech presentation, my midwife was forced to terminate my care under Maryland's regulations.

Unable to find another provider local to me, I was forced to travel to a neighboring state. After laboring 24 hours and a baby who wouldn't drop, the birth center and I chose to transfer to a hospital for more choices.

As a result, I had to have what was deemed as an "emergency c/s" (even though me and Baby were fine by all measures). At the hospital my written birth plan was not respected and my husband experienced extensive secondary birth trauma.

But I'm not just a mom who finally got her VBAC, I'm also Dr. Kendra O'Hara, a Licensed Clinical Marriage and Family Therapist and owner of a mental health practice in Harford County where I employ nine providers, two of which are perinatal mental health specialists working extensively with birth trauma.

Through my own two birth experiences in the last 16 months, through supervising my team, and through working clinically with women on their postpartum journey - I've seen firsthand the gaps in care in Maryland.

HB351 is not just a lofty bill, it's necessary. I could go on and on about the statistics of the mental health prevention associated with women getting to choose their care team and birthing in the way that best suits them. And that data is important.

To me, more important is my personal testimony reminding you of the impact of a woman birthing vaginally after c-section: *"it feels so redemptive."*

I am here today - physically healthy, mentally well, and so strong because I got my VBAC.

It's time that my Licensed Direct Entry Midwife be able to deliver my *next* baby and that women all over Maryland be supported in their birth wishes of having a VBAC by these competent and professional care providers.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
*Kendra A. O'Hara*, PhD, Licensed Clinical Marriage and Family Therapist  
Electronic Signature 2/20/23 at 10:27am