

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

Chair Peña-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to you today in favor of HB351. As a mother of two who has given birth twice I strongly believe in a woman's right to choose the care provider she feels most comfortable with at her birth.

My first birth was in the state of GA in 2010. Like MD at the time, CPMs we're not quite legal. However I've known pretty much since I was a kid that if I ever gave birth I'd use a home birth midwife. So I hired one while also paying for and attending concurrent care at a hospital practice. This gave me peace of mind that if I ever had to transfer it wouldn't be into a hostile and unknown territory with providers I'd never met. Though, only one provider in that practice knew my actual plan to attempt a home birth first. That always felt dishonest and uneasy for me, but I believed very strongly in the care providers I had hired and knew they are who I would feel most comfortable with during one of the most transformative moments of my life. I did have a non-emergent transfer for that baby and my back up plan went well.

Years later, back in MD, I was planning for my second home birth. Again, the state I lived in hadn't yet legalized CPMs, or direct entry midwives. Regardless I knew I felt most comfortable being cared for by a CPM. I had interviewed a few and knew without a doubt who I wanted to care for and guide me during my pregnancy and to attend my birth. But once again I incurred double expenses and sacrificed additional time during my pregnancy attending redundant appointments by hiring backup care with a hospital provider in case I had to transfer. Should that need arise I wanted it to be a smooth transition. Fortunately, this time I gave birth successfully at home.

All in all I feel fortunate for my pregnancies and birth experiences. While I wish I hadn't needed to transfer the first time I was fortunate to have received care from two different systems to ensure that my experience, physically, emotionally and mentally was one that I wasn't traumatized by.

During my pregnancies and years of small babies I met up with many other mothers through a birth group to discuss birth and early childhood. Without a doubt birth is one of the most, if not THE most, transformative moment in a woman's life. I've heard numerous stories from many mothers who weren't as fortunate as I and didn't feel they were given choices during their birth and the

subsequent impact that had on them, their babies and their families. I've also talked with moms who knew they didn't have a choice of the provider they hoped for so made the decision to birth unassisted anyway, because while that was a risky choice it was less scary/risky to them as choosing the provider they didn't want and risking more trauma from care they didn't consent to.

Direct entry midwives are highly capable and trained in birth. In my experience with concurrent care during two pregnancies they spent nearly 4x the amount of time with me and cared for me much more holistically than my backup providers. I was able to discuss any and all fears prior to birth and they would share the ways in which they're trained to notice anything that is not a normal or safe birth prior to an emergency arising. Direct entry midwives play a crucial role in caring for mothers and families in Maryland and as such are much needed for VBACs. The World Health Organization tells us that a 15% cesarean section rate is healthy. Maryland's rate is more than double that and one of the highest in the country. C-sections are not without risk and oftentimes leave women with severe trauma and physical ailments. Some of our counties have ZERO VBAC providers. Maryland should be leading the way as an example of a state that believes in a woman's right to choose who her care providers are, not leading the way in atrocious stats of unnecessary surgical births. The time is now to pass this bill, the health of our families depends on it!

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. Please join me in supporting this bill and informed choice in Maryland.

Respectfully,



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