

Maryland SB-110 /Sponsor Senator Arthur Ellis

My name is Mary J. Schwalm and my husband and I have three sons. Two of our sons were adopted from the same birthparents, with whom we have an open adoption. Our oldest son was born in 2000 in Cambridge, Massachusetts at the healthy size of 10lbs 2oz. Laura, our birthmother, is a ward of the state of Massachusetts and on Medicaid. She did not have a doula at that birth and the labor was long and hard, but she was able to deliver naturally despite the large size of our son, but it was very difficult.

Over five years later I gave birth to our second son. It was my first full term birth and the delivery was traumatic. I was 42 and the doctor suggested a C-section, since I was dilating slowly after my water broke. The nurse suggested Pitocin and the doctor agreed and disappeared. One hour late I was pushing. Everything went perfect up until the tardy doctor literally ran in and cut me at the moment of delivery in a swift motion. My son's head, thankfully, missed her scalpel, but the severing of all my lower pelvic muscles set me on a course of deteriorating health problems and 13 years of pain. This past summer I had major abdominal surgery to correct some problems. My highly-sought abdominal surgeon told me that 75% of his patients are women needing corrective surgery because they have had bad childbirth deliveries.

Thirteen months later, Laura, our birthmother, was pregnant again at age 42. At 38 weeks Laura was induced to avoid having another 10lb baby because she is so petite. My husband, children and I drove up to Massachusetts and arrived shortly after Laura began receiving Pitocin in the hospital. To my surprise there was a doula attending Laura. I had heard of them but wasn't quite sure of their function. This is an option open to mothers in the Medicaid system in Massachusetts. Although Laura had been through birth before, the doula explained the processes that her body was going through and encouraged Laura as she fulfilled the milestones of her birth plan. The nurses came and went as both mother and baby's vitals were monitored. The doula kept reminding Laura to be patient as her natural birth rhythms took over from the inducement. Through the night the doula calmly encouraged Laura and advocated for her to the nurses and doctors. She was very experienced and gave us direction in how we could make Laura more comfortable during the labor pains, massaging her and finding better positions. The doula quietly sat back while we reminisced about the years, told stories, and sang songs through the night to entertain and comfort Laura through the long hours.

Finally as Laura began pushing, the birthfather, Ronnie, and I assisted her. The nurses came in and encouraged Laura while they prepared the room and called the doctor. We were unaware of the medical personnel through the night as we focused on Laura and mostly heard the voice

of the doula, who constantly encouraged us all. Laura asked the doctor to please let me catch the baby and the doctor agreed with him aiding as the third hand. With the doctor by my side in the room, I joyfully received our healthy 8.5lb son, Charlie, at his moment of birth. It was one of the best experiences of my life. After his vitals were checked and he was cleaned up a bit, the nurses laid him on Laura's chest with the birthfather and I by her sides. There wasn't a dry eye in the room. The doula stayed with Laura until we got her to a room where she could sleep, and she even checked on Laura the next day to see how she was doing.

I believe that the doula was a vital part of Laura's current good health and Charlie's great start in life. The more time that a mother has to naturally deliver a baby, the better her health will be in the long run and the less trauma for the baby. I wished that I could have had a doula to advocate for me during the birth of our second son. The doula was instrumental in allowing Laura to feel safe and in control of this birth. She was attentive to Laura and agreed to Laura's wishes that were within reason. The doula always explained what was happening and encouraged Laura to keep to her birth plan. The doula allowed this incredible event to be a special memory that Laura, Ronnie and I will always share.

I believe every mother going through birth should have a doula. A woman who is on Medicaid is especially at risk for negligent healthcare and often doesn't have the community to encourage her in the birth process. Birth is the most natural thing in the world but they need someone to advocate for them so they can focus on the baby. Women should not be forced into a C-section or a rushed birth needlessly in the interest of saving time for the doctor or hospital, which could easily lead to long term health problems. I believe that the expense of a doula during birth will save the healthcare system money later, if a mother is allowed to slowly and safely deliver naturally.