

Testimony of Erinn Camp Mansour

SUPPORT FOR SB914:

Doulas - Doula Technical Assistance Advisory Group and Certification

Senate Finance Committee Hearing

March 10, 2020

My name is Erinn Camp Mansour and I am the mother of three beautiful, healthy children all born with the support and advocacy of doulas. I would like to share my experiences with you in the hopes that this information will encourage you to issue a favorable report for SB914.

Like many women, my ideas about childbirth were greatly influenced by my mother. She had me in a hospital in DC in the early 1970s and, although she was happy to be a mother and have a healthy baby girl, she was unhappy with the clinical, impersonal, and dismissive way she was treated by her doctor, and the hospital, as a young pregnant woman. The obstetrician she saw when she became pregnant told her that “birth is a surgical experience,” and also told her “you can have me or your husband in the delivery room, but not both.” So, she switched doctors and hospitals, so that my father could be present when I was born. However, even after this change, there were still interventions and aspects of her first birth experience that made that delivery more difficult and her recovery longer and harder than it should have been, and left her with a fairly negative feeling about that birth experience.

Although she wanted more children, she wanted to be sure that the next time she gave birth, the experience was more natural, personal, comfortable, and private. Ten and twelve years after I was born, she had my brothers, but this time with the assistance of nurse midwives -- one brother was born in a birthing center and then my youngest brother was born at home, while I was downstairs. My mother was much happier with the care and treatment she received from these nurse midwives, in the birthing center and at home, than she had been with a traditional hospital birth.

My mother also breastfed me and my brothers for many months and taught me about the physical and emotional benefits of nursing, both for mothers and babies. She encouraged me to believe that pregnancy, giving birth, and breastfeeding are natural events that should be joyful, intimate experiences for women, their babies, and their families. Giving birth is not automatically or necessarily a surgical procedure, although access to excellent doctors and medical care are clearly both necessary and life-saving sometimes.

So, when it was my time to prepare for the birth of my first child, I did my research, considered my alternatives, and decided that I wanted my birth experience to be as natural as possible. I wanted to avoid medical or surgical interventions, as much as I could. However, since hospital protocols and procedures had changed a lot in the 30 years since I was born, I had different options.

Holy Cross Hospital, in Silver Spring, Maryland, was the hospital used by my OB/GYN and her practice at that time, and Holy Cross Hospital had a doula program. It was somewhat unusual, but the doula program was integrated into the maternity services offered at the hospital. This reduced the likelihood of conflict or competition between hospital staff and doulas, which I had heard could sometimes happen when the doulas are completely separate from the hospital system. However, the doula services were not covered by my insurance, so I paid for my doulas out-of-pocket.

We spoke on the phone before the birth about my birthing plan and questions I had. They stopped by after the birth to check on us and assist me with nursing. Mainly, however, they were there during the birth in the hospital to help me do as much as possible without medical intervention.

Fortunately, we could afford to pay for our doulas, and I had a mother who was supportive, available, and shared my views about childbirth who could also actively support me before, during, and after my first birth. She was home with my kids for my second and third birth, so again, it was really helpful to have a doula with me at the hospital, since she couldn't be there. Not all women have these financial resources and family support. In addition, I didn't want my mother or my husband to feel pressured to be my birthing coach, or to know everything there was to know about how to have a successful and natural childbirth experience in a hospital.

Having a doula there as my coach, guide, and advocate for the natural birthing plan I preferred was wonderful. She gave us concrete tips about what to bring with us to the hospital to make the experience more comfortable. She provided practical tips on positions and techniques during the birth and she was extremely helpful and reassuring throughout the process to minimize the need for staff doctors and nurses to help me. She told my husband what to do to help me, too, so he felt useful and engaged.

I think that every woman deserves full and equal access to doulas as part of her childbirth team for prenatal, delivery, and postpartum care. These supportive services should be covered by medicaid and insurance programs because they are important wellness and preventive care measures that expand women's access to affordable quality care and reduce the need for more costly and risky interventions. Doulas reduce healthcare costs, while keeping women and children healthy. Please support SB914.

Sincerely,
Erinn Camp Mansour
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043
Master of Public Policy (MPP)
University of Maryland School of Public Policy
erinn@campmansour.com
410-841-3653