



To: Delegate Wilkins, Chair and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee  
From: Venicia Gray, Associate Director, Federal & State Government Affairs  
March of Dimes  
Date: March 9, 2021  
Re: SUPPORT – HB1202 – Hospitals and Birth Centers – COVID-19 Visitation Policies – Doulas

Dear Delegate Wilkins, Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the House Government Operations Committee:

The March of Dimes Inc. would like to express support for HB1202. This emergency legislation is necessary for the health of women and their babies allowing doulas to provide personal and physical nonclinical support to a woman during the woman’s labor, delivery, and postpartum recovery during the COVID-19 crisis. Today in the U.S., we face an urgent maternal and infant health crisis that has only intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic. Every year in this country, approximately 700 women die of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>i</sup> These numbers are disproportionately higher for moms and babies of color.<sup>ii</sup>

Doulas are non-clinical professionals who provide physical, emotional and informational support to moms before, during and after childbirth, including continuous labor support.<sup>iii</sup> They offer guidance and support around topics related to childbirth, breastfeeding, pregnancy health and newborn care. Supportive care during labor may include comfort measures, information and advocacy.<sup>iv</sup> While there’s no reliable estimate of the number of doulas in the U.S., a centralized online doula registration service, not affiliated with any one certifying organization, had over 10,000 registered doulas in 2020.<sup>v</sup>

There are many benefits of doula care including improved health outcomes for moms and babies, increased spontaneous vaginal birth, shorter duration of labor, decreased use of analgesia, instrumental vaginal birth, and low five-minute Apgar score. Studies have shown doula care also leads to reduced C-sections which are a contributor to the risk of maternal morbidity and mortality.

March of Dimes supports increased access to doula care as one tool to help improve birth outcomes and reduce the higher rates of maternal morbidity and urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee for a favorable report on HB1202. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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- <sup>i</sup> Hoyert DL, Miniño AM. Maternal mortality in the United States: Changes in coding, publication, and data release, 2018. National Vital Statistics Reports; vol 69 no 2. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2020.
- <sup>ii</sup> Petersen EE, Davis NL, Goodman D, et al. Vital Signs: Pregnancy-Related Deaths, United States, 2011-2015, and Strategies for Prevention, 13 States, 2013-2017. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2019;68(18):423-429.
- <sup>iii</sup> DONA International. What is a doula? Available at:<https://www.dona.org/what-is-a-doula/>
- <sup>iv</sup> Hodnett ED, Gates S, Hofmeyr GJ, Sakala C. Continuous support for women during childbirth. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2013 Jul 15;7:CD003766.
- <sup>v</sup> DoulaMatch.net. Available at: <https://doulamatch.net/>