



The Honorable Delegate Shane E. Pendergrass  
Chair of the Health and Government Operations Committee  
The Honorable Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk  
Vice Chair: Health and Government Operations Committee  
House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Greetings,

My name is Krystal Leaphart and I am the Advocacy Co-Lead for Black Girls Vote, Inc., a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to engaging, educating, and empowering black women to activate their voice by using their vote. I would like to thank the Senate dFinance Committee for the opportunity to share why this issue is important to our organization.

Black Girls Vote has four main pillars, voting rights, economic empowerment, education and of course health. Black Maternal Health and Wellness is one of our main advocacy focus areas. Below you will find some reasons why these issues must be addressed and why widespread access to doulas services are essential to ending black maternal deaths:

1. According to the Center for Disease Control, black women are disproportionately affected by maternal mortality. For every 100,000 live births, about 40 are victims to pregnancy related deaths[[1](#)]. That is 3 times more than the rate for white women. The CDC also says that  $\frac{2}{3}$  deaths are preventable.
2. Black women are much more likely to receive no prenatal care, or to receive it later than the first trimester, than women of any race besides American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian. [[2](#)]
3. Black women are more likely to suffer from hypertension and pre-eclampsia, which increase the chances of adverse health outcomes for mothers and babies. [[3](#)]

The question is what can Doulas do to help address these issues. There is research to suggest that continued support, like doulas services, reduce the needs for cesareans and instrumental birth.[[3](#)] Also, oftentimes black women's pain is not taken into consideration. A Doula that is familiar with the expecting parent is able to help the patient identify serious concerns and get help in a



timely manner. Some expecting parents may feel like the focus is on the child that is being born. And while Doulas do focus on the baby, they also make sure the parents are being cared for as well. If we want to end black maternal mortality, it is essential to make sure that Doula services are available, affordable and covered under health care plans as well. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before this body. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Krystal Leaphart  
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Black Girls Vote, Inc.  
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#### References

1. [Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Pregnancy-Related Deaths — United States, 2007–2016](#)
2. [Timing and Adequacy of Prenatal Care in the United States, 2016](#)
3. [What Role Could Doulas Play in Addressing Black American Maternal Mortality?](#)