

I am Colleen Good from Harford County. I am a mom of two and I write this in support of House Bill 351.

When I got pregnant with my daughter almost three years ago, I began seeing a team of nurse midwives and OBGYNs at the hospital I worked at and prepared for the daunting event that is childbirth. I was blessed with an uneventful pregnancy. I longed for an unmedicated birth and expressed this to my medical team, who seemed indifferent to my desires. All my prenatal care lacked informed consent. It was assumed I would consent to every test and exam without much education on the reasons for intervention, such as cervical checks and bloodwork. I barely got fifteen minutes with my provider, so they quickly answered and dismissed my questions to move through the appointment. I was two days past my due date when my provider expressed concerns about my pregnancy extending much further. With a perfect heartbeat on my baby girl, no blood pressure concerns for me, I was shocked. I was able to argue my way into holding off my induction until 41 weeks and 1 day with some extra monitoring. I enter the hospital for my induction extremely nervous regarding what is ahead of me, as I was uninformed that the provider scheduled that evening was one I had never met before. Settled in my hospital bed, this provider walks in without introducing herself, puts gloves on, and lubes her fingers to check my cervix. This invasive exam was performed by someone who did not even tell me her name, nor explained what she was doing. I paced most of the night unable to sleep, even though I was not having contractions yet. They later started me on Pitocin, a medication to induce contractions. Despite my desire to avoid an epidural, the nurse continued to increase the dose on the medication until my contractions were giving me no time to rest in between. After hours of working through them I gave in and got an epidural. When time to push, I pushed for four hours. Thankfully, I was able to deliver her vaginally as she tolerated the long pushing period. My daughter cried perfectly and required no interventions once born. We adjusted to our new baby while barely sleeping between trying to feed her and being interrupted almost hourly in our hospital room. We started off our postpartum period emotionally exhausted from the long process at the hospital and physically tired from the poor rest we got before discharging home. Postpartum was difficult emotionally and physically, and I doubted for months whether to have another child.

Early in 2021, my husband and I were expecting again. We both agreed we could not go through the process we went through in the hospital unless necessary. I began my search for a home birth midwife, which led me to Deanna Kopf. She assured me at our first visit that she believed in a "hands off" approach during labor, meaning no interventions, unless medically necessary or requested by the mother. Each prenatal visit was 45 minutes to an hour long, where we discussed my diet, physical activity, and emotional health. Before examining my stomach, they always asked if they could touch me. I was educated on every test offered to me before consenting, so I could make informed decisions for me and my unborn son. Never once was there a discussion for inducing me, as both my baby and I remained healthy. I naturally went into labor eight days after my due date. I was able to sleep in my own bed for a few hours before contractions intensified. I listened to music in my bedroom and breathed through the contractions. Deanna and her student came to my home and asked to check my vital signs and check baby's heartbeat. Once they were finished I was left to labor with my husband, as they set up their emergency supplies and watched me from a distance. My body naturally began to push, so I got in the birth tub as soon as possible. I was never told to labor or push in a certain position, so I did what my body felt it needed to do. My son was born without any issues, he breathed perfectly and cuddled quietly with me. After delivery, we were able to rest in our bed to work on breastfeeding. Deanna and

her student monitored vital signs for me and my baby and watched my bleeding, before leaving us to rest. We napped and ate in bed as we recovered and adjusted to this new life. Postpartum has been a completely different experience for me physically and emotionally this time around, and I credit that to the amazing care I received from Deanna and her team and the beautiful experience I was blessed with.

If my first birth had ended in a c-section, I would not have been able to give birth to my son at home. Despite the statistics showing how safe a VBAC can be, many women are deterred from vaginal birth in hospitals after a prior c-section. By giving direct-entry midwives the ability to work with these women with a prior c-section, it gives women a choice where and how they want to birth their babies. It gives women prenatal care beyond quick, impersonal appointments. The prenatal care offered by these midwives is empowering, as they encourage women to care for themselves physically and emotionally and allow them to trust their bodies during this natural process. Midwifery care allows informed consent. Many women do not need, nor do they want interventions during their labor and birth. Bill 351 allows women a choice when choosing prenatal care, despite a prior c-section.