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The Honorable Joseline Pena-Melnyk
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
House Office Building, Room 241
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

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HB838 - Health Occupations- Licensed Direct Entry Midwives - Revisions

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Committee:

My name is Janell Nanasi and I am a mother of three beautiful children. My journey into motherhood deeply shaped my passion for birth options and maternal healthcare. My first child was born in a birth center with a nurse midwife, and my next two were born at home in a birth pool, supported by skilled CPMs. Through these experiences, I witnessed firsthand the value of having safe, informed choices in childbirth.

With a background in nursing and experience working as a birth doula in a California hospital, I have seen both the benefits of midwifery care and the challenges families face when access to these options is restricted. I know how important it is for families to have the ability to choose the birth setting that aligns with their needs, values, and medical circumstances.

That's why I urge you to protect and expand midwifery care in Maryland—ensuring that every family has access to safe, respectful, and evidence-based birth options.

Maryland has the opportunity to lead the nation in maternal healthcare by ensuring families have the right to make informed choices about their birth experience. Midwifery care and home birth should remain legal, accessible, and respected options.

Patient Autonomy

- Every family deserves the freedom to choose where and with whom they give birth.

Personal testimony

- I found my care from my CPM to be far superior in every way than what I observed in the hospital and even what I experienced with a CNM in an out-of-hospital birth center. From the hour long prenatal visits to the thorough education on all my pregnancy and birth choices, to the ability to have my labs drawn without leaving the comfort of my own home. My care experience was more personalized, convenient, comfortable, thorough, and safer. Instead of being one of many women laboring in a hospital, being exposed to a myriad of strangers and germs, with a monitor strapped on, an overworked nurse checking in on me, and a doctor eager to give me a c-section. I had my midwife, who had taken care of me my entire pregnancy, plus an additional back up midwife there to assist during my labor, monitor my and my babies vitals at regular intervals, prepare a specialized birthing tub in my own

bedroom to provide non-pharmaceutical pain relief, assist me in every way during labor and delivery, carefully make sure the baby and I were safe and not in need of transfer to a hospital for additional care, provide thorough immediate postpartum care for both the baby and I without disturbing infant bonding, assist with breastfeeding, clean up from the birth experience, stay for multiple hours after birth to check our vitals and ensure we were healthy and safe, and then return for multiple postpartum visits through 6 weeks in the privacy and comfort of my own home. This individualized care far exceeds what can practically be provided by a hospital for the average patient giving birth. My postpartum experience was incredible with high Apgar scores for my baby, minimal discomfort and postpartum bleeding for myself, no perineal damage from birth, and no postpartum depression.

- Restricting midwifery care limits choice, forcing families into hospitals even when a safe, evidence-based alternative exists. Birth works! It is a normal physiological process like any other bodily process. Home birth midwives are highly knowledgeable of physiological birth versus the medicalized approach seen most often in the hospital setting. When a true emergency situation arises, we are grateful for the services hospitals provide. But in the absence of an emergency situation, I have found hospital birth to be hyper vigilant and potentially even creating issues through unnecessary interventions rather than preventing them. And also for certain demographics I have seen hospital care to be blatantly neglectful leading to issues. See studies regarding maternity care and maternal mortality rates for minorities for additional information on this topic.

Safety

- Studies confirm that planned home births with trained midwives are safe for low-risk pregnancies and reduce unnecessary interventions. After being a doula in a California hospital and seeing the high rates of birth interventions and c-sections being performed, I felt safer and more comfortable birthing in the privacy of my own home with a skilled provider than in a hospital system.

- Without legal midwifery care, families still seek home birth—often without trained professionals, increasing risk. Having grown up on a farm caring for a myriad of pregnant livestock, I know that disturbing the birth of an animal disrupts the natural flow of birth hormones that assist in a quick and easy delivery. Turning on bright lights, loud noises, unknown people coming in suddenly, or moving the birthing animal could result in a longer and more complicated labor or even stop labor entirely for a season. Why is this practical wisdom not heeded in today's hospital birthing culture? Why instead do we immediately pack up and drive as fast as we can to a hospital when we are in labor, disrupting the natural flow of birth hormones. What animal runs miles away as soon as they go into labor. We give more respect and privacy to a horse giving birth and do not doubt their capacity to birth their foals, and yet we are disrespectful to the human woman in labor and doubt their ability to give birth in much the same way. This knowledge definitely tempted me to give birth unassisted when finances were preventing me being able to hire a home birth midwife and insurance would not cover such services.

My home birth experiences have been some of the most life changing, memorable, and empowering experiences of my life. They were short, easy, and not overwhelming painful. On the contrary pain was minimal due to free access to the water birth pool and there not being unnecessary cortisol in my system from rushing to the hospital and being attended by strangers. I believe in homebirth so much so that if access to home birth was restricted in Maryland, I would even cross state lines to access such care were I to have one more child. But why should I have to do something so drastic? Maryland should keep homebirth as a legal birth option.

Healthcare

- Midwives ease the burden on hospitals by caring for those who don't require medical intervention. For those of us who desire home birth attended by midwives, this decrease in hospital patient load is a benefit to our already impacted system.

- Expanding midwifery access improves maternal outcomes, lowers healthcare costs, and provides personalized, culturally competent care.

I believe in midwifery care. Birth is biology, not pathology in most cases for low risk pregnancies such as mine have been. Maryland could be the leader in setting the standard for compassionate, evidence-based maternal care. I urge you to support policies that uphold informed choice and ensure all families have access to safe, respectful birth options including home births provided by CPMs.

Thank you,

Janell Nanasi