

February 21, 2025

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

RE: **HB838 Licensed Direct-Entry Midwives**

Dear Chair Joseline Peña-Melnyk and the Health and Government Operations Committee:

My name is Katherine Pontarolo-Maag, and I am writing to ask you to support and vote favorably on HB838.

This bill will modernize the practice act for Licensed Direct Entry Midwives in the state of Maryland. LDEMs have been established, professional, and safe providers for a decade and deserve to have more practice autonomy and less restriction, like other independent healthcare practitioners.

During my eight years of experience as a Spanish medical interpreter for a hospital system, I became intimately aware of what maternity care looks like in an outpatient and hospital setting: In addition to interpreting dozens of times for hospital births, I also interpreted for countless prenatal appointments and postpartum checkups. Although it was a privilege to serve as a medical interpreter for Spanish-speaking patients and their English-speaking healthcare providers, my experience witnessing firsthand how the full spectrum of maternal healthcare unfolds in the hospital system informed my choice to pursue a different model of care when I became pregnant with my son.

I chose to have a planned home birth and will forever be grateful to the midwife team who supported me throughout my journey into motherhood. Hour-long prenatal appointments were the norm with my midwife and her midwifery student, allowing us to get to know each other far more than would have been the case had I gone the traditional route—busy outpatient clinics such as those where I interpreted simply do not have the capacity to attend to each patient with that level of holistic attention. My midwife team's thorough, compassionate care combined with the education they provided at every step and decision point cultivated my deep trust in their expertise. They empowered me to make well-informed decisions about my pregnancy and delivery.

When I woke up in labor early in the morning the day my son would be born, I was so grateful to be able to stay in the warmth, comfort and familiarity of my own home, knowing that my midwife team would be coming to meet me where I was—a significant shift from the paradigm of hospital-based birth care. Delivering in a hospital often means that, during the course of your labor and delivery, you are greeted by multiple new faces of healthcare professionals whom you have never



My son, Leo Joon, shortly after his birth at home.

met before and who are simultaneously attending to the needs of several other patients; home birth midwifery is very different. When my midwife team arrived at my home the day I gave birth, not only did we already have a close relationship thanks to their holistic care throughout my pregnancy, but their attention was also completely devoted to supporting me and my husband as we welcomed our son to this world.

The unparalleled care of home birth midwifery extends beyond the day of giving birth as well. My midwife and her student came to my home multiple times in the weeks following my delivery to continue providing nurturing, supportive care as I transitioned into the world of motherhood. They independently provided all of the care that my newborn son needed in the first days after birth. Furthermore, they sent comprehensive reports to my son's pediatrician, who commented on how much he appreciated their level of detail and thoroughness.

I respectfully ask for your support for HB838 so that the exceptional midwifery care I received may continue to be accessible for others seeking this model of care during the momentous journey of welcoming a child to this world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katherine Pontarolo-Maag".

Katherine Pontarolo-Maag  
603 South Rose St  
Baltimore, MD 21224  
MD Legislative District 46