

# ***BIRTHNET***

*20 ELM STREET, ALBANY, NY 12202*

## **CARE-EDUCATE-SUPPORT-ORGANIZE**

### **Testimony for the Senate Hearing on Integrating Doulas Into NYS's Maternal Healthcare System**

#### **Doulas Save Lives. Period.**

Let's start with that. The presence of a doula decreases maternal mortality and morbidity, reduces pre-term birth, decreases surgical birth, decreases the use of medications and other medical interventions in birth, increases breastfeeding rates and increases satisfaction and mental wellbeing after birth. Women are dying during birth, and Black and Brown women are dying at a much higher rate than their white counterparts. Two to three times higher. As are their babies. Three to four times higher. This is unconscionable.

There are a lot of factors that impact these startling statistics: Implicit bias, institutional racism, social determinants of health for marginalized families – further, Black and Brown birthing people report being disrespected, not seen or heard, their plans or preferences for birth ignored, their experiences of pain often disregarded, their symptoms of life-threatening complications dismissed. The news and hearings such as these are full of such reports. Doulas are a part of the solution to this health care crisis. Black and Brown doulas, especially.

Birthnet is a local birth justice organization whose mission it is to eliminate the inequities in birth outcomes for all birthing people. We fundraise specifically to train and compensate BIPOC doulas to serve those families most negatively impacted by birth disparities. In 2019 we trained 22 doulas of color here in Albany to support families during birth, breastfeeding and postpartum. At the end of this month. we will train an additional 30 Black and Brown doulas to continue to improve the mortality and morbidity rates of birthing parents.

Doulas provide constant support during birth, visiting families both prenatally and in postpartum, and are a watchful eye for anything outside of the realm of normal

and healthy. Doulas safeguard and protect the rights, the agency, the autonomy and the cultural sensitivities and preferences of laboring people with their continuity of care, their advocacy, their hands-on comfort measures, and their ongoing emotional and informational support.

When a mechanism exists for doulas to bring their services to bear on the most vulnerable of populations, those populations become less vulnerable. They become healthier, stronger and more mentally and emotionally stable – they become better equipped to manage the major life transition of birth and parenthood, they become better connected to the health care system when complications arise. When Medicaid reimbursement for the work that doulas do in and for marginalized communities exists, doulas can be paid for their work.

Many Black and Brown doulas working in low-income communities are not equitably compensated for their work, and in many cases are not compensated at all for their time and their talent. This is unsustainable. We must find solutions for making the support that doulas provide a built-in option in our maternity care system. There is a healthcare crisis in NY which fatally impacts families of color. There is an evidence-based solution which involves training and paying BIPOC doulas to serve the needs of BIPOC families and significantly improve birth outcomes for them and for their babies. The answer lies within the community.

BirthNet has been part of the solution to address this deadly crisis. Please help us continue our work and support the doulas we train by providing Medicaid reimbursement for the services that they provide. Together, we can save lives.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and for the opportunity to address the Public Hearing on how to identify and examine best practices for integrating doulas into NY's maternal healthcare system. New York can easily elevate its own standing in the country when it comes to addressing maternal and infant morbidity and mortality, by simply elevating and compensating BIPOC doulas for the positive impact they make in saving the lives of Black and Brown birthing parents and their babies.

Respectfully submitted,

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