

Human Services Committee

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
S.B. 1078: An Act Concerning Doula Certification and Medicaid Reimbursement for Doula Services

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide, nonprofit organization that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. For forty-five years, CWEALF has led the development of policy solutions that enhance women's economic security and increase access to reproductive healthcare. CWEALF is an active member of the Coalition for Choice, a group that promotes policies that improve women's access to reproductive healthcare and protects a woman's right to bodily autonomy.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support *S.B. 1078: An Act Concerning Doula Certification and Medicaid Reimbursement for Doula Services* to establish funding under the Medicaid program for doula services, set a rate of reimbursement for doula services to ensure an adequate number of providers of such services meet the needs of Medicaid recipients, and establish a certification process for providers of such doula services.

The United States has the highest rate of pregnancy or childbirth related deaths in the developed world and is also one of just 13 countries where the rate of maternal mortality is now worse than it was 25 years ago.

Maternal mortality is a critical racial justice issue: Black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes as their white counterparts. Racial disparities in pregnancy-related deaths show that across all income and education levels, Black women in the U.S. are at higher risk for poor outcomes than white women.

In Connecticut, babies born to Black mothers are more than three times more likely to die in their first year of life than those born to white mothers. Babies born to Latina mothers in Connecticut are more than twice as likely to die in their first year of life as those born to white mothers.

Evidence strongly suggests that providing Doula support through Medicaid is likely to reduce racial disparities in maternal health. In birthing rooms, Doulas often ward off discrimination and racism and give people the tools they need to make the best decisions about their pregnancy. This lowers the cost of childbirth, and leads to healthier and happier experiences during delivery.

Research also shows that Doula care improves health outcomes for mothers and babies, decreases postpartum depression and increases breast feeding. Doula care also reduces the likelihood of costly interventions such as cesarean births and epidural pain relief, as well as spending on non-beneficial medical procedures or avoidable complications. When patients receive Doula care, they report feeling valued and having a voice in consequential childbirth decisions.

According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine, Doula services are “one of the most effective tools to improve labor and delivery outcomes”; however, a significant barrier to access doula care, which is not routinely covered by health insurance, is cost.

As Connecticut continues to identify innovative ways to combat health disparities, lawmakers must view access to Doula care as a critical health equity intervention. CWEALF urges the Committee to support S.B. 1078 and ensure that all people in Connecticut receive adequate health care services.