

In Support of HB 2388: Equitable Access to Birth Options & Midwifery Care in Oregon

February 24, 2021

Dear Chair Prusak and Members of the House Health Committee,

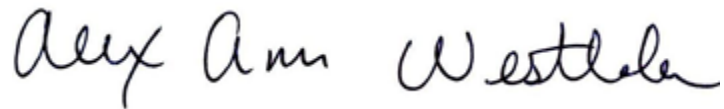
My name is AlexAnn Westlake. I am a Certified Nurse Midwife, a board member of the Oregon Affiliate of the American College of Nurse Midwives, a parent who gave birth in a community-birth setting, and the director of Our Community Birth Center, a nonprofit birth center in Lane County that is currently in its startup phase to restore birth center services. My entire county and two neighboring counties do not have any birth centers since the closure of our local birth center in 2019.

This testimony is a call for your support for equitable access to birth options and midwifery care throughout Oregon. Why do we need this in Oregon?

- The data clearly shows care by licensed midwives in all birth locations improves health outcomes for birthing people and babies and reduces costs to the health care system. In Oregon, this includes Certified Professional Midwives, Naturopathic Doctors with a certificate in Midwifery, and Certified Nurse Midwives.
- The covid pandemic has shined a bright light on health care inaccessibility and inequity and the importance of fostering an integrated health care system. HB 2388 is one step forward on that journey.
- We are in the midst of a long-standing crisis of high perinatal death rates. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are two to five times more likely to die around the time of childbirth than their white counterparts. This crisis is largely attributed to systemic racism and bias in our health care systems, as well as the overuse of cesarean sections for birth. Fair access to birth options and culturally-matched midwifery care is an effective intervention to save lives. This recommendation to increase access to midwifery care comes directly from national organizations such as the [Black Mamas Matter Alliance](#) and the [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#) as well as our local coalition of supporting organizations including Forward Together, Alliance of Black Nurses Association of Oregon, Oregon Public Health Association, and others.
- As a midwife in Oregon, I have seen families take on debt that they couldn't afford in order to have their preferred birth provider and location because their insurance would not pay for their birth center birth or homebirth.
- I have seen healthy birthing families give birth in the hospital only because they could not access other options and in the end this situation actually leads to increased costs for insurers because birth center and homebirth are safe and much more cost effective for healthy normal birth.
- I have also seen families choose to give birth unassisted at home because their insurance would not cover a midwife. This is a safety issue stemming from lack of equitable access.
- I also see community-based midwives working extremely hard to serve their communities and provide access to care. Unfortunately, these midwives operate small businesses and simply cannot sustain their services without fair insurance reimbursement. This has led to numerous birth center closures over the years in Oregon. This most significantly impacts our rural communities and small towns where small midwifery practices and birth centers cannot survive without fair insurance payment for their services.

HB 2388 will enable more pregnant people in Oregon to access midwifery care with all types of licensed midwives in Oregon in community-birth settings. Birth centers will be able to provide care to people in our communities and more birth centers will be able to open in communities that currently don't have access to birth center care. This bill will increase the integration of perinatal health care throughout Oregon by bringing midwives and birth centers into the circle of integrated care rather than pushing them away to the fringes. Many say this bill actually does not go far enough; however, it is a significant step in the right direction to increase equitable access to healthcare. In addition, I am excited to support this bill knowing that it was developed through an interdisciplinary workgroup with midwives, physicians, insurers, consumers, and legislators all at the table.

Please support HB 2388 to improve access to care for Oregon families,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Ann Westlake". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

AlexAnn Westlake

Certified Nurse Midwife and Executive Director of Our Community Birth Center in Lane County
Board Member of the Oregon Affiliate of the American College of Nurse Midwives