

Testimony in Support of SB692: Expanding Access to Perinatal Services

Chair Reynolds and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Tricia Hafner, and I am a birth doula with 10 years of experience supporting families through pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. I am here to offer my strong support for SB692, which expands access to essential maternal health services, including doula care, lactation consultations, and postpartum support.

Over the years, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact that doula services can have on families. In recent years, I have had the privilege of supporting clients through the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), which has allowed me to continue doing this important work while also providing for my own family. It has also allowed my clients to receive the care they want and need, without having to worry about the financial burden. This bill, by expanding access to doula services beyond OHP, PEBB, and OEBC, will make these vital services available to even more families—giving them the support they need without the stress of choosing between essential services.

Providing physical, emotional, and informational support to families before, during, and after childbirth is invaluable. This bill is essential for ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background or insurance status, have access to culturally competent, trauma-informed care.

Here are a few reasons why this bill is critical:

1. Increasing Access to Culturally Competent Care:

Many individuals in our community face barriers to receiving care that is culturally specific and culturally competent. This bill's provision of grants to culturally specific organizations and training for doulas will directly address these disparities. Doulas from the communities they serve can offer support that is grounded in the family's cultural values and experiences, which has been shown to improve birth outcomes.

2. Expanding Access to Essential Services:

The expansion of coverage for doula services, postpartum doula services, and lactation consultations is a step toward ensuring that families have access to the support they need for a positive birth experience. These services not only reduce the risk of complications but also promote better mental health outcomes for both parents and babies. As a doula, I know that continuous support throughout labor and after birth can be a game-changer in helping families feel empowered and supported during one of life's most transformative experiences.

3. Supporting the Sustainability of the Doula Workforce:

The reimbursement rate for doula services set forth in this bill is critical in ensuring that doulas can continue their work. By establishing reimbursement rates that are competitive with other states like Washington, we can help ensure that doulas can sustain their practice while offering equitable services to families who need them most.

4. Improved Birth Outcomes:

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the presence of a doula during childbirth leads to improved birth outcomes, including shorter labors, lower rates of cesarean sections, and better breastfeeding initiation rates. This bill will allow more families to benefit from this support, resulting in healthier mothers and babies, which ultimately benefits the entire community.

5. Reducing Health Disparities:

The expansion of doula services to all recipients, without requiring referrals or prior authorizations, ensures that doula care is accessible to those who need it. By removing barriers to this care, we are creating a more equitable healthcare system.

In conclusion, I urge you to support HB692. This bill provides an essential opportunity to enhance maternal health, and ensure that all families, have access to the best possible care before, during, and after childbirth. I am proud to be part of a profession that makes such a profound difference in the lives of families, and I believe this bill will help expand that impact across Oregon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Tricia Hafner
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