

February 17, 2025

Subject: Support for SB 692

Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health:

My name is Desha Holden-Nelson, and I wear many hats, but today, I write to you as the owner of helpHER Doula Services, a certified lactation counselor, and a member of Black Futures for Perinatal Health. With a Masters in Public Health, I am deeply committed to creating systems of care that uplift society, with a focus on those who are most impacted. Because when we design for those most vulnerable, we design for everyone. SB 692 provides support for our most vulnerable populations.

I am an educated Black woman. Yet, despite my education and socioeconomic status, I am part of the ethnic group for whom factors like education and wealth do not guarantee better birth outcomes for women and our babies. We cannot ignore the importance of those two final words: *our babies*.

I recently worked with a mother who faced complications in her pregnancy, including hypertension. She was hospitalized before her due date, and had to be induced. Over the course of three days, I stood by her side, bridging the gap between her, her spouse, and the medical team, helping her navigate pain and uncertainty. Her baby, like many, was expected to spend time in the NICU. That time in the NICU was significantly shorter than providers anticipated after we worked together to collect colostrum to feed her baby.

Doula care and breastfeeding support are essential, especially in instances like these. I held space for this family, reminding them, and the medical team, that their work is not just about the body, but about the heart. This mother had just bought a home, but her family couldn't afford doula and lactation support—services that were made possible only through a nonprofit funder.

Funding for doula care and ongoing breastfeeding support should not be left to community organizations to provide. It must be integrated into our healthcare system. I urge you to understand that access to culturally responsive lactation support goes hand in hand with doula support and Medicaid is not the only place that we must legislate this care. I am writing in support of Black women and families, knowing that the disparities in birth outcomes and breastfeeding duration are deeply rooted in the impacts of racism. Today, you have the opportunity to help create a fairer, more powerful system for our women—and our babies.

Thank you,

Desha Holden-Nelson, MPH, CLC, CPST
helpHER Doula Services & Consulting, Owner
Black Futures for Perinatal Health, Member