



Post Office Box 12350 | Portland Oregon | 97212

February 17th, 2025

Expanding the Perinatal/Doula Workforce to Improve Black Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes

As the **Program Manager for Sacred Roots**, Portland's largest **culturally specific doula and lactation program**, I strongly support **SB 692**, which would expand access to culturally specific perinatal services and increase the number of culturally competent lactation providers and doulas in Oregon.

At Sacred Roots, we provide **comprehensive, community-based perinatal and lactation support** for Black families, a population that continues to face significant disparities in both maternal and infant health. **Our lactation program employs the largest number of Black lactation providers in Oregon**, with two **Pathway 3 students currently on track to sit for the IBCLC exam** in Fall 2025 and Spring 2026. When they pass, they will make up **two of only six Black lactation consultants in the entire state**.

This is critical because Black mothers face **some of the lowest breastfeeding rates and the highest barriers to lactation support** due to systemic racism, lack of culturally competent providers, and limited access to evidence-based lactation care. Nationally:

- **85% of Black mothers initiate breastfeeding**, but by six months, that number drops to **58%**, compared to **76% of white mothers**.
- Black mothers are **2.5 times more likely to be offered formula in the hospital**, disrupting early breastfeeding success.
- Structural barriers—such as **lack of paid maternity leave, inadequate postpartum support, and systemic bias in healthcare**—often lead to **shorter breastfeeding durations and lower exclusivity rates**.

**Sacred Roots is changing these outcomes by:**

-**Offering home-based lactation support**—meeting moms where they are, breaking down access barriers.

- **Employing Black lactation providers**—ensuring parents receive care from professionals who **understand their lived experiences**.

-**Integrating lactation support into doula care**—helping birthing parents establish breastfeeding **before, during, and after birth**.

-**Providing long-term postpartum support through our Mothers Promise Club**, a **one-year**



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**program** that ensures mothers receive consistent lactation counseling, resources, and community support.

**SB 692 would allow us to expand these efforts.** By increasing funding for community-based perinatal programs, this bill would:

- Help diversify the lactation workforce** by creating sustainable pathways for Black lactation professionals.
- Expand culturally specific perinatal services**, reaching more families who are often left out of traditional maternal health systems.
- Improve breastfeeding rates and health outcomes for Black mothers and babies**, leading to lower infant mortality and better long-term health.

**We cannot afford to overlook the importance of culturally competent, community-rooted care.** This bill is an opportunity to **invest in Black maternal health, diversify the perinatal workforce, and break down systemic barriers that have historically excluded Black families from receiving the care they deserve.**

I urge legislators to **support SB 692** and ensure that programs like Sacred Roots can continue to **build equity, change breastfeeding outcomes, and save Black lives.**

Sincerely,

Michelle Smith

Black Parent Initiative Program Manager, **Sacred Roots Doula & Lactation Program**