

Submitter: Aaron Caughey
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB692

Chair Reynolds and members of the Health Committee. My name is Aaron Caughey, and I am an obstetrician, perinatal epidemiologist, and health economist. I serve as Professor and department Chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology at OHSU. I am also the medical director for the Oregon Perinatal Collaborative. I've had the privilege of working in the field of perinatal health for over 25 years, and I am deeply grateful to have chosen this path. Most of us know our own birth stories from our mothers, it's etched in our memories. My mother gave birth in the 1960s, a time when childbirth was often overly medicalized. Her story was not one of empowerment.

The most fulfilling part of my work is spending time with families and being a witness to one of the greatest moments of their lives—the birth of their children. Today, we have the power to reflect on historical shifts, consider available research, and create new chapters in the stories of birth in this country. Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to work with a multidisciplinary team convened by Senator Reynolds to make a difference in perinatal outcomes in Oregon impacting both maternal and childhood outcomes – the bills that were developed are a great start to improve the health and wellbeing of Oregon families.

I was first introduced to working with doulas while practicing in the Bay Area, and at that time, the relationship between doctors and doulas was somewhat oppositional. But over time, this relationship has evolved, and I'm proud to say that today there is overwhelming evidence supporting the positive impact doulas have on the birthing experience.

My research group conducted a study that found that professional doula care during a first birth resulted in fewer cesarean sections and improved quality of life for both mothers and babies. Additionally, the use of doulas was cost-effective leading to greater benefits than the costs.

It is time we professionalize this essential field. Currently, most doulas cannot have a sustainable career, often due to low wages and inconsistent work. We need to support a system where experienced doulas can flourish and continue to support families. This includes ensuring they are compensated with a living wage that reflects that the work they do is unpredictable and requires many on-call hours.

The medical field has embraced the fact that doulas and doctors are part of a greater healthcare team, it is time for insurance coverage to catch up. There is excellent medical research regarding the impact of doulas and it is our responsibility to use

these findings to inform our practice and make decisions that are aligned with the best available evidence. A birth story is one we all share, and today you have an opportunity to create legislative impact on the perinatal health field. By embracing the role of doulas, you lean not only into the data and the economics but into human centered care. I urge you to Vote yes on Senate bills 691, 692, and 693.