

March 19, 2025

Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Subject: Support for SB 1167

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

My name is Desha Holden-Nelson, and I am a doula, lactation counselor, childbirth educator, and car seat technician. I am writing in strong support of **SB 1167** to fund birthing villages/ learning hubs in the Portland metro area.

This bill is essential because many families lack access to quality, culturally competent maternity care, leading to preventable complications. Hospital systems do not have capacity to spend more time with patients and current state and federal funding shifts are actively reducing access to perinatal health services across the state. It is more important than ever that Oregon make investments to increase access to culturally competent, supportive services for babies and mothers during the perinatal and postpartum period.

As a doula, I have seen first hand that education and income are not protective factors for all racial groups' birth outcomes. Data shows that babies are less likely to be born prematurely and with low birth weights when doulas, community health workers, midwives, and culturally congruent providers are engaged in their care. The lack of community-based maternal care affects Black and Brown mothers, low-income families, and rural communities, leading to higher mortality rates, low birth weight, and birth trauma. While some may say this funding would be better spent on early childhood education, children enter the school system disadvantaged when mothers are experiencing the toxic stress of systemic oppression without cultural protective supports before they are born. Studies show that [babies born prematurely are at greater risks for cognitive and school performance issues](#).

Birthing villages/Learning Hubs can help by:

- Providing culturally competent, community-led care
- Reducing maternal and infant mortality through early intervention
- Offering holistic prenatal and postpartum support
- Addressing racial disparities in maternal health
- Creating jobs for birth workers and healthcare providers

I urge you to **pass SB 1167** to ensure families have access to safe, dignified maternity care.

Thank you for your time,

Desha Holden-Nelson, MPH, CLC, CPST
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