

Senator Lisa Reynolds and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michelle Smith, and I serve as the Doula & Lactation Program Manager at Black Parent Initiative, a culturally specific organization dedicated to supporting Black families. I am also a mother, Certified Doula, Certified Lactation Counselor, Maternal & Child Health Advocate, and a proud member of my community.

I am here in strong support of SB 1167, which seeks to fund birthing villages and learning hubs in Portland, Oregon (Multnomah County). This bill is critical for addressing the gaps in access to quality, culturally responsive maternity care that many families in our community experience. Too often, the mothers we serve are forced to travel long distances to receive adequate care, increasing their stress and risk of complications. Many families are fearful of giving birth in hospital settings but cannot access alternatives like birth centers due to barriers related to insurance, location, and a lack of available resources.

The absence of community-based maternal care disproportionately affects Black and Brown mothers, low-income families, and those in rural areas—many of whom are part of the Black Parent Initiative community. As a result, we continue to see preventable outcomes such as higher maternal and infant mortality rates, birth trauma, preterm births, and low birth weights.

Birthing villages and learning hubs offer a meaningful solution by:

- Providing culturally competent, community-led care
- Reducing maternal and infant mortality through early intervention
- Offering holistic prenatal and postpartum support

- Addressing the racial disparities in maternal health
- Creating sustainable jobs for birth workers and healthcare providers

I urge you to pass SB 1167 so families can access safe, dignified, and culturally affirming maternity care. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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