

HB1464 Testimony
House Human Services
February 03, 2025 – 9:00AM

Hello, Chairman Ruby and members of the House Human Services Committee. My name is Shelly Davis. I am an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. I am also the mother of an amazing 7-year-old boy and the stepmother of two wonderful stepsons.

I am providing testimony in support of House Bill 1464.

Over the past year and a half, I have gained valuable insight into the profound impact of doula care on mothers and babies. Engaging with maternal and child health experts, as well as practicing doulas, has highlighted the many benefits they provide, particularly during the postpartum period.

Recent studies confirm that doulas improve outcomes for both mothers and infants. During postpartum recovery, they offer crucial physical, emotional, and social support, reducing anxiety and the risk of post-traumatic stress. Additionally, doulas are trained to recognize signs of postpartum depression and other perinatal mood disorders, encouraging mothers to seek help. The trust between a mother and her doula fosters emotional security, strengthening the mother-child bond.

In February 2017, I gave birth to my son. Living in Fargo, I was fortunate not to face the long journey to a hospital that many mothers in North Dakota endure. One night, I experienced manageable contractions and waited until my OB appointment the next morning. At my appointment, my doctor informed me that I was 4 cm dilated and needed to be admitted. My partner, Jacob, was with me and stayed by my side the entire time. While the medical staff provided excellent care, complications arose. I developed a fever, and my labor stalled. That evening, the doctor recommended a cesarean section. Though it was not in my birth plan, I immediately agreed out of concern for my baby's safety, as we were told the baby was stressed but not in distress.

My son was born healthy, and we bonded quickly. While breastfeeding started well in the hospital, I struggled at home. Though he eventually latched, the initial difficulty triggered months of anxiety about his feeding. Concerned about his limited weight gain, I bought a scale and eliminated dairy from my diet, suspecting an allergy. I also met with two lactation counselors but didn't open up as much as I should have during the limited clinical appointments. Additionally, I began pumping to maintain my supply but found it challenging. At one of his early check-ups, it was confirmed that his weight gain had slowed, and my worry grew. After months of daily anxiety, I finally sought help when my family expressed concerns about me and my own weight loss.

Looking back, I regret not seeking support sooner. My son was fine and thriving, but I spent months battling anxiety and, eventually, depression. These struggles prevented me from fully enjoying those early months, and I often wonder how my emotional state at the time affected him. Though I had heard of doulas, I did not fully understand their role.

Through my work, I now recognize the invaluable support doulas provide. Had I had a doula in 2017, I believe I would have opened up more than I could with family, as I felt they were already too busy for me to burden them with my struggles. A doula would have recognized my challenges and encouraged me to seek help, providing the trusted guidance I so desperately needed. Furthermore, a doula likely would

have been able to offer support with breastfeeding, which could have helped to address those early struggles.

By passing House Bill 1464, the legislature can build on the great policy work already done in this area, such as the recent expansion of Medicaid coverage for eligible pregnant women from 60 days to 12 months. This bill will increase access to doulas for mothers who need them and perhaps for those who do not yet realize how much they need them, as I did in 2017. Investing in doula care is a critical step toward improving postpartum support and overall well-being for mothers and their babies.

Thank you for your time.