

Hearing on HB 1464 - Senate Human Services Committee
Christina Sambor – Lobbyist No. 312, American College of Obstetricians and
Gynecologists
March 5, 2025

Chair Lee and members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Christina Sambor, I am here on behalf of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, referred to as ACOG. Founded in 1951, ACOG is the premier professional membership organization for obstetrician–gynecologists. The College produces practice guidelines for health care professionals and educational materials for patients, provides practice management and career support, facilitates programs and initiatives to improve women’s health, and advocates for members and patients. I am here today to testify in favor of HB 1464, and to request that this committee amend the bill back to its original form and intent, which was to expand access to doula services for post-partum mothers by ensuring doula services are covered by Medicaid.

The postpartum period can be an extremely challenging time. Having just gone through pregnancy, childbirth, the first weeks and months caring for a newborn while recovering from pregnancy can be stressful, in particular if you lack a support network. There is evidence that doula support in the postpartum period can improve both maternal and neonatal outcomes. Doulas do not provide medical expertise or give medical advice, but rather should be a source of emotional, physical, and education support only (based on the Doulas of North America or DONA code of ethics).

Patients report to their OBGYNs that they often feel alone after delivery and are in need of additional support. Currently the only individuals who have access to this support are those who can pay for this cost, leaving a large group of individuals without access to this resource. This bill in its original form requires that doulas receiving payment from Medicaid for their services are required to be certified, which holds them to certain standards such as those set out by DONA international. As stated above, doulas should not be providing medical advice, but rather providing assistance with non-medical support and companionship, assisting with newborn care and sibling adjustment, meal preparation and household organization as examples. Tasks such as examining the baby and giving medical advice are not allowed for doulas who are certified and following their code of ethics.

Payment for doula services should be covered under Medicaid but should not reduce the rate of reimbursement for other components of prenatal and postnatal care delivery, such as physician reimbursement for services provided or facility fees. Prenatal and postnatal care delivery is a team-based effort and each component should continue to be compensated fairly for providing their important portion of care.

Thank you for your time today. On behalf of ACOG, I ask this committee to restore the original intent and impact of this important bill, and to recommend a do pass as amended. Doing so will support all post-partum North Dakota mothers and ensure that those suffering under economic stress are not deprived of necessary and beneficial support they need as they enter parenthood.