

Honorable members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Markie, and I represent the Bismarck Doula Community, an organization dedicated to supporting families in central North Dakota.

We are here today to respectfully express our concerns regarding the proposed bill, specifically the language that could require postpartum doulas to undergo training through a specific organization. While we understand the intent to ensure quality care, we believe that this approach could have unintended consequences for both the doulas currently serving families and the families themselves.

As an organization that works closely with families across North Dakota, we are committed to providing care that is individualized, family-centered, and sensitive to the unique needs of our community. Doulas are a non-regulated profession, and we have found that the flexibility to train through a variety of organizations and methodologies is what allows us to serve families in the most effective and personal way possible. Restricting this flexibility could limit access to care for many families, particularly in our rural areas where the supply of professionals is already limited.

We were also heartened to learn that the provision requiring Medicaid coverage for doula services was removed from the bill. However, we remain concerned that the specific training mandate, without insurance coverage, could inadvertently create barriers for doulas and the families who rely on their support. Without the possibility of insurance reimbursement, postpartum doulas could face increased financial strain, and those who are already working with low-income families may no longer be able to offer their services. This is particularly troubling for families who rely on doula support during critical postpartum periods, when personalized care and guidance are so important.

Moreover, as an organization, we have made the decision to move away from working with DONA International because we have found that their approach to training and support does not always align with the needs and values of North Dakota's diverse communities and extensive certification process is financially straining and almost impossible to reach in rural communities. We've heard from families of various cultural backgrounds that a more flexible and culturally responsive approach is necessary. Additionally, some of the past training efforts by DONA in our state have created tension with Native American communities, and we've worked hard to build positive relationships with these communities. It's important to us that the training organizations we partner with reflect the values and needs of all North Dakotans.

In light of these concerns, we urge the committee to carefully consider the potential impacts this bill may have on both doulas and the families we serve and reject this bill. We believe

there is a way to ensure quality training and support for postpartum doulas while preserving the flexibility that has allowed our profession to grow and serve families in a way that is responsive to their unique needs. Restricting training to one specific organization, especially without insurance coverage for services, could unintentionally create barriers to care and limit the support available to families in North Dakota.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I open the floor for any questions.