

## **Testimony to Senate Health & Welfare**

**S. 53**

**3/13/25**

**Maria Rossi, MSW & Doula**

Thank you for having me today.

My name is Maria Rossi. I have been a doula for 15 years and am also a social worker. I work for Washington County Mental Health Services (WCMHS) where I coordinate a Doula program.

14 years ago, with the help of Mary Moulton, our Executive Director at the time, I created The Doula Project at WCMHS. TDP provides prenatal, birth and postpartum community doula support to those who receive Medicaid assistance and qualify for services. Our funding is a mix; relying on grants and scholarships to pay for birth support. We are Community Doulas. Community Doulas provide intensive, longer-range support with an emphasis on culturally congruent, community-based care to underserved individuals and families.

I also co-founded our statewide doula group, the Doula Association of Vermont. I am here today as the legislative and advocacy arm of DAV.

I am so grateful and excited to see the state of Vermont commit to maternal and infant health, especially for the most vulnerable families in our communities, who often experience the worst outcomes. Almost 40 years of data tell us clearly that doulas improve medical and mental health outcomes of birthing people including reduced risks of premature birth, cesarean birth, higher rates of breastfeeding, and lower rates of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. Doulas are also in a unique role to provide early intervention support when families are struggling. Doulas are a protective factor for families and have gone underutilized for far too long.

Dr. John Kendell, a pediatrician and researcher once said “If a doula were a drug, it would be unethical not to use it”

DAV wholeheartedly supports OPR’s Sunrise Report on certifying Community Based Doulas in Vermont. DAV worked closely with OPR with their Sunrise study process. They were incredibly collaborative in our work together. OPR guided us on community engagement, supported families to share their experiences, shared our training and experiences as doulas, and provided relevant data and studies done in other states. 25 states are implementing or have already done so, giving us an opportunity to learn from them. We found OPR to be thoughtful, thorough, and committed, and Doula Sunrise Study reflects that. DAV supports the findings and recommendations of The Doula Sunrise study, and we ask that you support this bill this year.

I helped to write the first doula bill eight years ago and am so grateful to be sitting here talking to you about this today. We have been working hard to bring this work to fruition, and it means so much to so many people, thank you for listening.

