



The Honorable Ronald Mariano
Speaker of the House
State House, Room 356
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz
Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

June 22, 2022

Speaker Mariano and Chair Michlewitz:

On behalf of the undersigned coalition, thank you for your commitment to improving birth outcomes and reducing racial inequities in maternal health in Massachusetts. Specifically, we are grateful that the House prioritized the passage last session of Chapter 348 of the Acts of 2020, creating the Racial Inequities in Maternal Mortality Commission. The Commission, led by the indefatigable co-Chairs Decker and Comerford of the Joint Committee on Public Health, worked tirelessly over the last year to hold robust and difficult discussions, culminating in a comprehensive report and recommendations released last month.

We write today to urge you to take action on one of this report's top recommendations: H.4640, *An Act relative to out-of-hospital birth access and safety*. Despite its recent study order, the time to take action on this critical maternal justice bill—and in doing so, build upon your commitment to addressing our urgent maternal health crisis and racial inequities—is now. This bill is crucial to addressing the Commonwealth's urgent maternal morbidity and Black maternal health crisis. By integrating midwives into our existing maternal health care infrastructure, this important legislation will improve patient safety and expand access to care for the rapidly growing number of families planning an out-of-hospital birth. Specifically, H.4640 would integrate Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs), a key workforce that already provides healthcare for the majority of out-of-hospital births in the Commonwealth.

As the Supreme Court and State Legislatures across the country threaten to strip away the right to bodily autonomy, Massachusetts has a unique opportunity to ensure access to healthy maternal care and birth justice. To promote reproductive freedom in the Commonwealth, we must offer true choice amongst birth settings, and offer birthing people the care that best meets their unique needs and preferences.

An unprecedented number of expectant families in the Commonwealth have given birth at home since the start of the pandemic due to their concerns about infection risk, comfort, safety, hospital restrictions on birthing options, and hospital visitor policies. Demand had been increasing steadily for years. A new CDC report has found that the home birth rate in Massachusetts increased by 47% from 2019 to 2020, while increasing 22% overall in the U.S. with higher increases for Black birthing people.

Our state is one of only 13 in the nation that still lacks a regulatory framework to license and integrate CPMs into the healthcare system. CPMs have the training and professional standards to safely provide care in out-of-hospital settings, attending most births at home and at least a third in birth centers nationally. Massachusetts is similarly behind when it comes to freestanding birth centers, with only one currently operating statewide, out of 400 across the U.S. (By comparison, New Hampshire has four birth centers and Maine has three, both states with 80% fewer births each year than Massachusetts.) In states where CPMs are licensed, they are a key part of the midwifery workforce in both birth centers and home births. H.4640 would also improve patient safety by permitting licensed midwives to carry and administer life-saving medications, in accordance with their training and standard of care recognized in 37 other states.

Even before the pandemic, Massachusetts families have urgently needed access to high quality maternity care in all birth settings. Integrating midwifery care and out-of-hospital birth has been shown to reduce the need for C-sections, lower rates of premature birth and infant mortality, and increase breastfeeding while significantly lowering health care costs.¹ The pandemic has only amplified our nationwide health crisis marked by the worst maternal and infant mortality rates in the developed world. Due to structural racism, these burdens are disproportionately borne by Black families. Unfortunately, many mothers face rising rates of maternal deaths, "near misses" (severe morbidity), and disrespectful care, with racism exacerbating this crisis in our Black communities. It is no surprise that more families and birthing people are looking for models of maternity care that are safe, culturally appropriate, and reduce the need for medical interventions. Removing barriers to care, expanding access to birth options, and improving safety in all birth settings is essential to ensuring healthy and thriving moms and babies.

This legislation enjoys broad, bipartisan support with 83 cosponsors in the House and Senate. We are eager to work with any and all stakeholders to build consensus on the strongest possible language.

We respectfully urge the House to take immediate action to prioritize maternal health, bodily autonomy, and birth justice by including the language of H.4640 in any legislative vehicle that is moving forward this session. At a time when the federal government threatens to thwart our reproductive rights and birth choices, Massachusetts must step up.

Sincerely,

Carol Rose, Executive Director, ACLU MA

Susan J Hernandez and Katherine Rushfirth, Legislative Co-Chairs, American College of Nurse-Midwives Massachusetts Affiliate

Indra Wood Lusero, President, Birth Rights Bar Association

Emily Anesta, President, Bay State Birth Coalition

Ndidi Amutah-Onukagha, Director and Founder of the Center for Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice, Tufts University School of Medicine

(Signatures continue on the next page.)

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Nan Strauss, Managing Director, Policy, Advocacy & Grantmaking, Every Mother Counts

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Tina Sherman, Senior Maternal Justice Campaign Director, MomsRising, Inc.

Mary Lawlor, Policy Analyst, National Association of Certified Professional Midwives

Carol Sakala, Director for Maternal Health, National Partnership for Women and Families

Nashira Baril, Director, Neighborhood Birth Center, Co-Founder, Birth Center Equity

Ida Darragh, Executive Director, North American Registry of Midwives

Judy Norsigian, Board Chair, Our Bodies Ourselves

Nate Horwitz-Willis, Executive Director, Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts Advocacy Fund

Rebecca Hart Holder, Executive Director, Repto Equity Now

Lilly Marcelin, Executive Director, Resilient Sisterhood Project

Matthew Parker, Executive Director, Union of Minority Neighborhoods

Krina Patel, Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts

Gail Fortes, Executive Director, YWCA Southeastern Massachusetts

¹ Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, "Strong Start for Mothers and Newborns," 2018; Vedam S, et al, "Mapping midwifery integration across the United States: impact on access, equity, and outcomes." PLOS ONE. Feb 21, 2018; Midwifery Licensure and Discipline Program in Washington State: Economic Costs & Benefits, WA DOH, October, 2007