



Memo To: House Finance Committee
From: Kelly Nevins, Executive Director, Women's Fund of Rhode Island
Date: July 30, 2020
Concerns: EOHHS Budget- Support for Doula Service Coverage

The mission of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI) is to invest in women and girls through advocacy, research and strategic partnership designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. ***WFRI supports the Governor's plan to allocate \$95,000 in state funding to cover perinatal doula services.***

According to a six month investigation by NPR and ProPublica (found at <https://www.npr.org/2017/05/12/528098789>), the United States has the worst rate of maternal deaths in the developed world and is the only country where this rate is rising. Between 2013-2016, Black women in Rhode Island experienced severe maternal morbidity at nearly twice the rate of white women, according to our own Department of Health.

While most pregnancy related deaths are preventable, racial and ethnic disparities have persisted over time. Black women, regardless of their education or income level, are 3-4 times more likely than white women to experience maternal mortality and morbidity, one of the widest disparities in all of women's health. Black babies in America have more than double the infant mortality rate of white babies.

One strategy that has been shown to make a difference is through the use of doulas, who provide emotional and logistical support during a women's pregnancy through postpartum. They provide education, support and advocate for women to get better maternity care. Women who have a doula are less likely to have a cesarean section, shorter labor, have a low birthweight baby and they're less likely to experience a birth complication.

The Women's Fund of Rhode Island encourages the General Assembly to support this funding, which will improve racial disparities in maternal health outcomes in Rhode Island. Feel free to contact me at 401-262-5657 should you have any questions about this testimony.

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