



To: House Health and Human Services Committee
From: Ditra Edwards, Executive Director, SISTA Fire

Date: March 13, 2025

Re: House Bill 5858 - Prescriptive Authority for Certified Professional Midwives

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony today. Thank you to Representatives Stewart, Alzate, Cruz, Shallcross Smith, Kislak, Potter, McGaw, and Casimiro for sponsoring this bill.

My name is Ditra Edwards, and I am the Director of SISTA Fire. I am writing on behalf of SISTA Fire in strong support of House Bill 5858, which would establish the scope of practice for Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs) and grant them authority to prescribe medications for their patients. Passing this bill would allow CPMs to provide more comprehensive, independent care and unlock the full potential of this growing workforce to better serve our communities.

At SISTA Fire, we are committed to building and sustaining an intergenerational community of women and non-binary people of color in Rhode Island. Our mission is to advance collective power for social, economic, and political liberation — and access to culturally competent, holistic reproductive care is essential to that work.

For communities of color, access to care is not just a matter of convenience — it is a matter of justice and health equity. Establishing the scope of practice for CPMs to prescribe medications for healthy woman and well-body care, as well as out-of-hospital birth, would be a transformative step toward improving maternal and family health outcomes. Black, Indigenous, and other women and birthing people of color have long faced systemic barriers to care, and this bill would help remove some of those barriers.

Consider this: You're pregnant and struggling with hyperemesis gravidarum — severe nausea and vomiting that makes it hard to eat, sleep, or even function. Your midwife, the person who knows you best and whom you've built trust with over months of care, knows exactly what medication could help ease your suffering — but under current law, she can't prescribe it. Instead, you're told to make an appointment with a primary care provider or OB-GYN. That could mean waiting weeks for an appointment, finding childcare, taking time off work, and navigating a healthcare system that often feels cold and dismissive. For many families, particularly those with limited resources or inflexible work schedules, this is simply not possible.

Or imagine trying to quit smoking during pregnancy, fully aware of the risks it poses to your baby's health. Your midwife — the provider who understands your health history and supports you without judgment — could provide medication to help you quit. But instead, you are forced to seek out another provider, delaying access to care and increasing the chances of complications. These delays can mean the difference between a healthy pregnancy and one complicated by preventable health issues.

Allowing CPMs to prescribe medications within their training would remove these barriers and give families access to the care they need, when they need it, from the providers they trust most. CPMs are already trained to care for the whole person — physically, emotionally, and spiritually — and prescribing basic medications for pregnancy-related issues and well-body care would strengthen that holistic care model. It would reduce unnecessary delays, improve health outcomes, and reinforce the trusted relationship between midwives and the families they serve.

For communities of color, this is not just about expanding access — it's about survival. The maternal health crisis disproportionately affects Black and Indigenous women, who are more likely to experience complications and worse outcomes during pregnancy and childbirth due to systemic racism and gaps in care. Expanding CPMs' prescribing authority would empower midwives to provide timely, culturally competent care tailored to the specific needs of our communities. This would mean fewer missed appointments, less time lost from work, and fewer missed opportunities to prevent health issues before they become emergencies.

Supporting CPMs' ability to prescribe medications in line with their training is a critical step toward reproductive justice. It's about trusting midwives, trusting women and birthing people of color, and ensuring that everyone has access to the care they need — from the providers who know them best. Our families deserve care that is compassionate, responsive, and rooted in the wisdom of our communities. Expanding the scope of practice for CPMs would bring us closer to that vision of justice and health equity.

SISTA Fire urges you to pass House Bill 5858 to ensure that Certified Professional Midwives can practice to the full extent of their training and provide the comprehensive care that our families need and deserve. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.