

Dear Chair Donovan, Vice Chair Giraldo, Vice Chair Potter and Distinguished Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Natasha Sokol. I am a Certified Lactation Counselor (CLC), certified by the Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice. I currently live in Providence, Rhode Island. I would like to express my support for H.5861 – relating to insurance and the coverage of services provided by licensed CLCs.

I work in Rhode Island on matters related to perinatal health as a research scientist in the Center for Behavioral and Preventive Medicine at the Miriam Hospital, and assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University. I am also a community CLC practicing independently and have been in this field for two years. In my work as a CLC, I provide lactation support for families including making individualized assessments and plans to address issues experienced during breastfeeding, assessing milk transfer and infant growth, making necessary referrals to health care providers, and providing follow-up care to the families I work with. I also provide material and emotional support to families in the postpartum period. Most of my families continue to reach out over the course of many months, and in some cases years.

Breastfeeding can be highly beneficial to infants and birthing people and their developing relationships, and its benefits have been demonstrated at various points across the life course. Lactation support providers positively impact breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates, and drastically increase the likelihood that those who want to breastfeed are able to do so. This is particularly true when a lactation support provider lives in the same community or is racially and ethnically concordant with the individual seeking support.

All families deserve the level of support provided by lactation support professionals, but these services are inaccessible to most due to their cost. The current state of lactation support in Rhode Island is inequitable, but covering lactation support by health insurance would allow equitable access to all families in Rhode Island. For these reasons, I am writing to request that the Committee vote favorably on H.5861 to help improve the state of perinatal health in Rhode Island.

Thank you for your time, and thank you to the bill sponsor, Representative Stewart, for introducing such important legislation.

Sincerely,



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