

To: House Health and Human Services Committee

From: Susie Finnerty, CPD, CLC, MCSH

Date: 3/11/25

Re: Support, House Bill H5861: Insurance Coverage for Licensed Certified Lactation Counselors

Good afternoon,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony for House Bill H5861. Thank you to Representatives Stewart, Alzate, Cruz, Shallcross Smith, Kislak, Potter, McGaw, and Casimiro for sponsoring this bill.

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

I have worked in Rhode Island as a community doula for over ten years and a CLC for 5 years in my community. I work as a sole proprietor providing direct care to families, am in leadership with the Rhode Island Birth Worker Cooperative and serve on both the Rhode Island Breastfeeding Task Force and Maternal Health Task Force. I also breastfeed my 4 children over the course of 12 years and have been both the receiver of this important care, as experienced the consequences and risks of what can happen when I did not have access to support.

Families that my colleagues and I support are navigating lack of guidance and misinformation, issues with low supply, painful latch, confidence building, and more. I also take care of families experiencing lactation following the loss of a child and the emotions that come with making milk for a baby you expected to bring home. This is all supported in their home, they have my cell phone number and my complete attention. This also includes referrals to our incredible network of other specialists and care providers on their team as well.

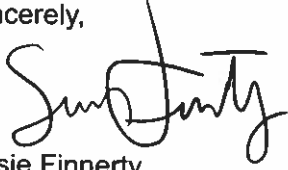
There is empirical data and consensus that breastfeeding provides significant benefits to mothers and babies as well as significant health care savings. There is a further consensus that breastfeeding rates are lower than optimal. Research has demonstrated that lactation support providers have a positive effect on breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates, particularly when a lactation support provider lives in, or is from, the same race and ethnic background as the individual seeking support.

Lactation support must be covered by health insurance in order to allow equitable access to all families in Rhode Island. Most families cannot afford to pay out of pocket to see a lactation support professional, especially when, more often than not, more than one visit is required in order to address breastfeeding concerns. For these reasons, I am writing to request that the Committee vote favorably on H.5861 in order to help families who are breastfeeding their babies

here in Rhode Island.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susie Finnerty". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "S" and a cursive "Finnerty".

Susie Finnerty