



Testimony in Support of S.B. 986, An Act Protecting Maternal Health

Public Health Committee

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Mendi Blue Paca

President & CEO, Fairfield County's Community Foundation

Senator Anwar, Representative Macarthy Vahey, and esteemed members of the Public Health Committee, Fairfield County's Community Foundation is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of **S.B. 986, An Act Protecting Maternal Health**

Fairfield County's Community Foundation serves the 23 towns and cities in Fairfield County. We work closely with community organizations, nonprofits, businesses, and philanthropists to address challenges and identify opportunities to create a Fairfield County where everyone has an equitable opportunity to thrive. Informed by three decades of partnering with and serving our community, we have awarded over \$390 million in grants to nonprofits in Fairfield County and beyond.

The Foundation is centering our investments on creating systemic and structural change in health, education, housing, and income and asset building to achieve greater racial equity and create a stronger, more thriving region. Through our Fund for Women and Girls (FWG), we have granted over \$9 million in sustainable solutions that have positively impacted the safety, health and economic security of women and girls across Fairfield County.

Our newest signature FWG investment, the emme coalition, is a research-driven collaboration with Optimus Health Care. It takes a holistic approach to address the barriers that prevent women and girls from receiving quality healthcare and reaching their full potential. **Doulas are an integral part of the emme program.** Doulas are trained, nonmedical professionals who provide physical, emotional, and informational support, virtually or in person, to a pregnant person before, during, and after birth. A doula's purpose is to help people have safe, memorable, and empowering birthing experiences. **Every expectant pregnant woman who receives emme direct services is assigned a doula. Of note, 100% of pregnant emme participants have had healthy births.** The emme program provides direct services to 100 women and indirect services to 1,000 more in the Greater Bridgeport region.

Studies also suggest that increased access to doula care, especially in underserved communities, can improve a range of health outcomes for mothers and babies, lower healthcare costs, reduce cesarean sections and help improve communication between low-income, racially/ethnically diverse pregnant women and their health care providers. Doulas provide critical support in Fairfield County where there is great need. Infant mortality rates for Black babies stand at 9.2 deaths per 1,000 live births compared to just 2.7 for white babies. Similarly, low-weight births for Black babies are twice that of white babies (13 percent compared to 6 percent), and the share of births with late or no prenatal care is twice as high for Black mothers than white mothers (about 7 percent compared to about 3 percent), according to the Fairfield County Community Wellbeing Index 2023.

Establishing a voluntary certification process will help increase the visibility and recognition of the profession, establish more sustainable funding options for doulas, expand the use of doulas across the state, and improve integration of doulas into the health system and as a part of the birthing persons team. Furthermore, a voluntary certification process should center the voices of doulas and those with lived experiences and can help ensure equitable access to certification for all doulas who wish to become state certified.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of **Testimony in Support of S.B. 986, An Act Protecting Maternal Health**

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Lutonya Russell-Humes, VP of Grants and Programs, at l Russell-humes@fccfoundation.org or 203-750-3223.