

A LETTER FROM DTI



Dear Governor Cuomo,

This week a bill was passed through the Senate and Assembly (A00364B and S-03344-B) regulating doulas in New York State. The bill, which would create a state certification for doulas and narrow the definition of "certified doula" to only those certified by NY State, was seemingly created without input from those working in this industry; doulas, doula training/certifying organizations, and non-profit community groups. We understand that this bill is an effort to address the same serious issues the state faces that were highlighted by the Maternal Mortality and Disparate Racial Outcomes Task Force which published recommendations in March 2019. Unfortunately, the bill as written would undermine the very community based doula work that is key to addressing these outcomes.

Doulas and doula organizations in New York State are united in working to reduce racial disparities in the lives of birthing people and their babies. This is a matter of life or death, it is not something we can get wrong. We see everyday that doulas from these same communities are the people on the ground doing the most important work within our profession. State certification for a non-medical support and educational role would undermine their ability to work with the clients who need them the most. Historically we have seen that examinations, fees, and continual re-certifying can act as a gate keeper against those in marginalized communities, such as birth workers of color, indigenous doulas, and queer or transgender doulas.

It is concerning that even those who already certified with a certifying organization in NYS would not be able to use the title "certified doula" without additional layers of regulation, and it is even more concerning that the language of the bill seems to say that no one could work as a doula at all in NYC without state certification. This would literally mean less skilled support for birthing people in New York State. Doulas are not medical professionals and should not be regulated as such.

As it stands, we believe this bill would do harm to various communities in NYS. If there is to be a bill passed that regulates the doula profession, then the stakeholders and people who are most knowledgeable about the real work on the ground need to be part of drafting the bill. The state should consult community doulas, certifying organizations, non-profit doula collectives, birthing people who have used doula services, etc. The birth community in New York is united in expressing their disappointment that we were all collectively not aware of or involved in the quick passing of this bill. Please consider vetoing this bill so that we can move forward together in a fair and productive way.

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Testimonial

I am first a woman of color, who believes in autonomy. I am a mom of 2 and used a doula and midwife of color for my births. We know it makes a significant difference to have care providers who look like us throughout our pregnancy and postpartum period. To be able to share experiences, feelings and get insight within our community is invaluable.

I am also a certified birth and postpartum doula through Doula Trainings International. I remember receiving a scholarship for persons of color from them in 2014 and getting so excited to see their culturally aware curriculum and for disparities to be highlighted in their in depth training, which also covers birth and postpartum support, business and newborn care and recovery. I wanted to build a career based on my passion, not just have a hobby in birth work. I wanted my people to be highlighted and our journeys to be discussed.

We know there are many obstacles to becoming doulas for black and brown people, and this bill will only make this goal more unattainable. To have to pay an additional fee to be considered state certified is biased and further pushes the divide in doulas. It plays on the pockets of people who have a passion to serve but may not have the finances for additional trainings, recertifications and continued education. There are doulas who also chose not to certify for various reasons, and they are no less skilled and effective birth workers

Who is to say what is a "good" doula training? Where are the voices of doulas and birthing persons who find doulas invaluable? I reside in Brooklyn and I am on the ground in my community doing the work with organizations like By My Side to serve black and brown families who are at risk of higher cesarean rates, maternal and infant mortality and lower breastfeeding initiation and duration rates. As a doula trainer and mentor I am aware of the many organizations that lack the cultural humility piece in their trainings, leaving many doulas feeling ill equipped to serve communities with disparities or/and navigating this work unprepared, leaving them burned out and leaving families at a disservice.

Unfortunately this bill, though made with good intentions, will leave many doulas unable to serve their communities and will leave black and brown birthing families with doulas who may not understand their concerns and journey navigating the health care system while being a minority. It's saddening to see how fast this bill became public and then passed with limited input from those it impacts the most. As doulas we give emotionally, physically, spiritually and mentally with our time and hearts. I'm happy to see many unite and our concerns being heard.

*Appreciated,
Simone Toomer, CD/CBE(DTI), CLC, CBC, LCCE, LLLL, ISE
DTI Educator and Mentor*

Cc: Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, Sponsor; Senator Jessica Ramos, Sponsor; Assemblyman Richard Gottfried, Co-Sponsor; Assemblywoman Galef, Co-Sponsor; Assemblywoman Jaffee, Co-Sponsor; Assemblywoman Rosenthal, Co-Sponsor; Assemblywoman Cook, Co-Sponsor; Assemblywoman Seawright, Co-Sponsor; Assemblywoman Arroyo, Co-Sponsor; Assemblyman Blake, Co-Sponsor; Assemblywoman Dickens, Co-Sponsor; Assemblywoman Pichardo, Co-Sponsor; Assemblywoman Thiele, Co-Sponsor; Assemblywoman Solages, Co-Sponsor; Senator Biaggi, Co-Sponsor; Senator Kaplan, Co-Sponsor; Senator Gaughran, Co-Sponsor; Senator Krueger, Co-Sponsor; Senator Rivera