

Uplifting Birth Justice Through Doula Care!



Artwork by Iman Geddy

What's a doula? Doulas are non-medical professionals trained to give physical and emotional support in childbirth. Doulas offer constant, uninterrupted attention and encouragement to the birthing person. They are skilled in comfort and relaxation techniques for labor (like position changes, breathing exercises, massage) and experienced in giving non-judgmental emotional support. Additionally, doulas can provide extended support during pregnancy and after giving birth.

"My midwife and doula made a huge difference. Doulas should be offered when you sign up for Medicaid. A doula can relate to you and speak for you when you can't speak for yourself. I didn't have any support in my pregnancy from my family except my grandma. Having a doula to have my back and stand up for me was really important — someone who can coach and give you peace of mind."

Anaya Kendall, Floridian activist, mom of one son

Facts About Doulas

- ▶ People with doula support are two times less likely to experience birth complications and four times less likely to have a low-birth-weight baby.¹
- ▶ Doulas make sure that their clients' voices are heard and that medical information is communicated directly to clients, so that clients understand and can make their own best choices for themselves and their babies.
- ▶ Doulas support people through miscarriages, abortions and adoptions.
- ▶ Doulas protect bodily autonomy in a system that consistently shows very little respect for pregnant, birthing and postpartum people.
- ▶ Community-based doula care is vital to addressing health disparities by building trust with folks who come from their communities and who share cultural values and lived experiences.²

Doulas are a critical way that we can address racial disparities in maternal and newborn health. In Florida and across the South, pregnant people from

marginalized communities give birth against great odds. Black mamas are three to four times more likely to die due to pregnancy-related causes than white mamas are. And Black infants are twice as likely to die as white infants.³

Many pregnant people — particularly young Black mamas — have been policed and shamed for their choices to have children. Access to doula care would provide critical support, but many folks don't have the financial resources to cover the cost of a doula out-of-pocket. To make doula care accessible to all Floridians, we need to cover doulas as part of Florida Medicaid, as in Oregon and Minnesota.

We can ensure that young Black mamas are treated with dignity and respect during childbirth. We can build a future where all birthing parents receiving Medicaid qualify for support for doula care. Doulas are a solution for improving health outcomes in Florida, so let's make it happen together.

1. Kenneth J. Gruber, Susan H. Cupito and Christina F. Dobson, "Impact of Doulas on Healthy Birth Outcomes," *Journal of Perinatal Education* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 49–58.

2. Julia Chinyere Oparah, Helen Arega, Dantia Hudson, Linda Jones and Talita Oseguera, *Battling Over Birth: Black Women and The Maternal Health Care Crisis* (Praeclarus Press, 2017).

3. Cristina Novoa and Jamila Taylor, "Exploring African Americans' High Maternal and Infant Death Rates," *Center for American Progress*, February 1, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/02/01/445576/exploring-african-americans-high-maternal-infant-death-rates/>.

Southern Birth Justice Network Midwifery care is holistic, healing, and humanistic. It has a rich herstory and legacy in communities of color. Our vision is to make this care accessible to all peoples, especially Black, Brown, youth, immigrant, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, low- income and other marginalized communities. Our mission is to expand Birth Justice by using story telling, popular education, and community organizing to improve access to midwifery and doula care.

Forward Together unites communities to win rights, recognition and resources for all families.