

# At Maternal and Infant Health Roundtable Discussion at University Hospital, First Lady Tammy Murphy Announces Introduction of Doula Access Bill

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*Legislation Ensures Doulas' Access to Hospitals and Birthing Facilities to Accompany Pregnant Mothers*  
*Legislative Sponsors Include Senator Teresa Ruiz and Assemblywoman Shanique Speight, as well as Senators Renee Burgess and Nellie Pou, and Assemblymembers Shavonda Sumter, Annette Quijano, Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, and Mila Jasey*

**NEWARK** – First Lady Tammy Murphy today hosted a roundtable discussion at University Hospital in Newark to discuss maternal and infant health progress in New Jersey and announce the introduction of [A5739](https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2022/A5739) (<https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2022/A5739>), which ensures pregnant mothers can be accompanied by their doulas in hospitals and birthing centers across the state. Under the bill, hospitals and birthing centers must develop and maintain policies that allow doulas to accompany patients before, during, and after labor and childbirth. These facilities will also be required to publicly post their policies and designate a contact to maintain communications between their staff, the doula community, and patients.

"Doulas are an essential part of an expecting mother's health care team and deserve to be recognized as such. Their involvement has been proven to reduce birth complications, lower rates of C-sections, improve mental health, and so much more. If I could change anything about my four pregnancies, it would be to have the support of a doula," **said First Lady Tammy Murphy**. "With the help of our partners in the Legislature, we are working to ensure that every mother in New Jersey has access to doulas in their greatest moment of need."

First Lady Tammy Murphy launched Nurture NJ in 2019 as a statewide program committed to reducing the maternal and infant mortality epidemic in New Jersey and ensuring equitable care among women and children of all races and ethnicities. In January 2021, the First Lady unveiled the Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan, a blueprint to reduce New Jersey's maternal mortality rate by 50 percent over five years and eliminate racial disparities in birth outcomes.

Today's bill announcement addresses two recommendations within the First Lady's [Nurture NJ Maternal and Infant Health Strategic Plan](https://nurturenj.nj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20210120-Nurture-NJ-Strategic-Plan.pdf) (<https://nurturenj.nj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20210120-Nurture-NJ-Strategic-Plan.pdf>):

- 1.) Develop a communications plan to promote benefits of midwifery and community doula models of care; and
- 2.) New Jersey hospitals should institute systemic changes to accommodate doulas and safe birth practices.

Since 2018, Governor Murphy has taken several steps and included millions of dollars of funding towards doula services and programs. The Governor's proposed Fiscal Year 2020 budget included \$1 million to implement doula coverage through NJ FamilyCare, which is New Jersey's Medicaid program. Medicaid officially began to cover doula care in 2021, making New Jersey the third state in the nation to expand this coverage and the first state to require doulas to be community doula trained – ensuring culturally competent care - to qualify for Medicaid reimbursement.

Additionally, the Governor included \$15 million in his Fiscal Year 2023 budget to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for perinatal, midwifery, and community doula care. This increase provided community doulas a maximum \$1,165 reimbursement for labor support and eight additional perinatal visits, up from \$900. The Fiscal Year 2024 budget also included funding to continue the training of community doulas throughout New Jersey. Since 2018, this continued effort has resulted in the training of over 250 new doulas in the heart of communities most impacted by high maternal mortality.

"The growing doula workforce is uniquely placed to help women where and when they need it most," **said Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Kaitlan Baston**. "The Department is proud of our role in creating doula training opportunities and continues to work to expand the workforce of community doulas and community health workers

to support families through pregnancy, birth and post-partum."

The sponsors of this bill include Senator Teresa Ruiz and Assemblywoman Shanique Speight, as well as Senators Renee Burgess and Nellie Pou, and Assemblymembers Shavonda Sumter, Annette Quijano, Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, and Mila Jasey.

"Elevating the quality of maternal health care across New Jersey is imperative," **said Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz.** "Women should know what our rights are and all of services available before, during and after giving birth. While I had a huge support system, having a doula with me who was objective, trained, and completely focused on my well-being and the health of my daughter was critical. The Administration and Legislature have been keenly focused on improving maternal health outcomes of all women. We must continue to make investments in our hospitals and organizations who have proven to elevate our efforts."

"Every woman deserves a safe and secure childbirth experience by having the knowledge and support of what resources are available to make that possible," **said Senator Renee Burgess.** "No matter what zip code you are from; And having a doula should always be an expected mother's option."

"Giving birth can be a physically exhausting, mentally taxing and emotionally draining experience. In a just and equitable world every birthing person should have access to quality and affordable health, and also have access to a trained doula who will be there to offer support to a mother before, during and after labor and delivery," **said Senator Nellie Pou, Chair of the Legislative Latino Caucus.** "The right to doula support should be available to all, and so this legislation will have a tremendously important impact on Black, Latina women and women of color, regardless their status or socioeconomic standing. With this measure, we will be putting our words to action, noting that mothers are among the most courageous people in ours or any society. Providing them with the full care and doula support they need during childbirth speaks to the heart of who we are and what we value as a people."

"In communities, particularly those of color, where challenging birthing experiences persist, this bill is a beacon of hope. It ensures that every parent, irrespective of background, has access to the resources necessary for a safe and empowering birthing journey," **said Assemblywoman Shanique Speight.** "Doulas, as tireless advocates, play a vital role in amplifying the voices of mothers in need, contributing to a more inclusive and compassionate maternal care system."

"In the state of New Jersey, Black mothers are 6.6 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than their white counterparts. This initiative is ultimately a crucial lifeline," **Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter, Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus.** "This bill is a step in the right direction to help eradicate racial disparities in childbirth. By championing this bill, we are taking a decisive step toward transforming New Jersey into a state where every mother, regardless of race or background, receives the adequate care and support she deserves. This initiative is a testament to our state's commitment to health equity and our dedication to the well-being of every family in our state."

"The disparities in maternal and infant health are not just statistics, they represent real challenges faced by my constituents every day. The introduction of this bill, ensuring that all mothers have access to doula support, is a critical step towards addressing these disparities and ensuring equitable, compassionate care for every mother and child in New Jersey. Drawing from the values instilled by my great grandmother, who served as a midwife in Puerto Rico, I am committed to championing policies that uplift and support the health and well-being of all women, especially those from historically underserved communities. Together, with initiatives like the First Lady's Nurture NJ program, we will improve the lives of our communities of color, particularly Black and Latino mother and babies, across our state," **said Majority Conference Leader Annette Quijano.**

"Empowering pregnant individuals with the support of a doula not only enhances their physical and emotional well-being but also nurtures a sense of confidence, ensuring a journey through childbirth marked by compassion, understanding, and strength," **said Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson.** "Supporting mothers of color is not just an act of compassion; it's a commitment to breaking down barriers, fostering equity, and ensuring every mother receives the respect, care, and opportunities she deserves for a brighter future for all."

"NurtureNJ, under the leadership of First Lady Tammy Murphy, is one of the most comprehensive undertakings dedicated to improving black infant and maternal health outcomes in New Jersey history," **said Assemblywoman Mila Jasey.** "As a former public health nurse and long-time lactation consultant, I know first-hand today's bill package, a collaboration with legislators, stakeholders and advocates, will continue the endeavor to achieve substantial and necessary short and long-term outcomes. I am privileged to have contributed to this extraordinary effort."

"As a practicing Obstetrician I have seen how labor support can make a pregnant person less fearful of the birthing process and more confident in their abilities. Doula care should be available to all that would like it prenatally, in labor and postpartum," **said Dr. Damali Campbell, OB/GYN, University Hospital.** "Recent legislation has made this closer to reality for NJ moms. Work continues to be done to increase the community doula workforce and to enhance the acceptance of doulas by facilities and labor room staff as an integral part of the team."

"With being turned away from facilities, especially births that were c-sections, this policy/ bill will further emphasize the depth of our emotional and physical support. We should not have to see what a policy is before we go to a

hospital from our social media groups or doula-sisters,” said **Tonique Griffin, Doula, Maternal and Child Health of Northern New Jersey.**

“My pregnancy journey was kind of hectic at first because I didn’t know a lot about pregnancy. I was prescribed higher medication dosages than what I was supposed to receive, which later caused me to be hospitalized. Having a Doula helped me a lot because she showed me the rights and the wrongs of how to handle my pregnancy. Not only was she there for me, but she was also my friend, and I knew I could go to her for advice. Having her in the hospital with me was a blessing because she let me know what to expect and was able to explain certain things the doctor would tell me that I didn’t understand. She also knew what I was comfortable with and what I wasn’t comfortable with and voiced that to the doctors when I couldn’t,” **said Shaunell Bullock, Mother and Resident, City of Newark.**

Copy of the A5739, click [here](https://d31hzlkh6di2h5.cloudfront.net/20231120/ed/30/23/6b/49b12015d1d6546192710236/23-5206_Assembly_002_.pdf) ([https://d31hzlkh6di2h5.cloudfront.net/20231120/ed/30/23/6b/49b12015d1d6546192710236/23-5206\\_Assembly\\_002\\_.pdf](https://d31hzlkh6di2h5.cloudfront.net/20231120/ed/30/23/6b/49b12015d1d6546192710236/23-5206_Assembly_002_.pdf)).

## Governor Phil Murphy

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