

## State of New Jersey

### Governor Phil Murphy

# At Trenton Nurture NJ Roundtable, First Lady Touts Investments in Governor's Proposed Budget to Combat Maternal and Infant Health Crisis

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**TRENTON** – First Lady Tammy Murphy today held a roundtable discussion at Children's Futures in Trenton to highlight \$1 million in funding in Governor Murphy's proposed budget to provide doula care service to expectant mothers on Medicaid. The investment will help combat racial disparities in health outcomes for New Jersey mothers and their children.

Research demonstrates that support from a doula is associated with lower caesarian section rates, fewer obstetric interventions, fewer complications, and the improved health of babies after delivery. Doulas support healthy pregnancies by providing culturally appropriate social and emotional support to pregnant women throughout the prenatal period, labor and delivery, and the postpartum period. The Governor's budget plan includes \$1 million to implement doula coverage through NJ FamilyCare, which is New Jersey's Medicaid program.

"Improving health outcomes for mothers and infants of color will need a comprehensive approach," **said First Lady Tammy Murphy**. "This \$1 million in funding for doula services and programs is just one part of our strategy to help eliminate the racial disparity in maternal and infant care. We have a long way to go in fighting for a stronger, fairer, and healthier New Jersey for every baby, every mother, and every family in this state, and this is just the beginning. I look forward to working with our partners in the Legislature to build support for this budget initiative."

In addition to this new proposed funding, as part of Nurture NJ and New Jersey Department of Health's current \$4.7 million investment in its Healthy Women, Healthy Families program, community partners have hired 77 outreach workers – 40 doulas, 29 community health workers and eight community health worker supervisors – to improve the health of black women. Sixty-three women are participating in the doula pilots. To date, 19 have delivered their child with the support of a doula.

"We are grateful to the First Lady for her leadership in the fight for health equity and anxious to make doula services part of the NJ Medicaid program," **said Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson, who oversees Medicaid**. "Building a stronger and fairer New Jersey means giving every mom and infant the support they need to thrive, and culturally appropriate doula services can help us give moms and infants of color the strongest possible start."

"Doulas can be life-saving advocates during and after childbirth, increasing the likelihood a mother will have an optimal birth," **said Health Commissioner Dr. Shreef Elnahal**. "They are incredible professionals who help women navigate through some of those most challenging times of their lives."

"When it comes to taking care of our soon to be mothers, New Jersey's record is unacceptable in the 21st century," **said Senator Loretta Weinberg**. "By expanding doula care we can greatly improve the lives of our mothers and their babies in our state, and I thank the First Lady for calling attention to this important issue."

Today's announcement is part of Nurture NJ, First Lady Tammy Murphy's statewide awareness campaign that is committed to reducing infant and maternal mortality and morbidity and ensuring equitable maternal and infant care among women and children of all races and ethnicities. The campaign, which is devoted to serving every mother, every baby, and every family, includes a multi-pronged, multi-agency approach to improve maternal and infant health among New Jersey women and children. Nurture NJ includes internal collaboration and programing between departments and agencies, an annual Black Maternal and Infant Health Leadership Summit, the First Lady's Family Festival event series, and a robust social media strategy to inform and raise awareness.

"Children's Futures Doulas are truly focused on improving birth outcomes and creating positive birthing experiences for women of color in Trenton," **said June Gray of Children's Futures**.

"The Nicholson Foundation is proud to support the Nurture NJ campaign's work to bring much-needed doula care to more women in communities across the state," **said Dr. Arturo Brito, Executive Director of The Nicholson Foundation.** "Together, we are making New Jersey the safest place to give birth for all women."

"The need for community doulas to support our state's most at-risk women was recognized and highlighted by African-American and Latina women leaders from our most underserved communities," **said Jeanne McMahon, Director of Health and Family Support at the SPAN Parent Advocacy Network.** "As an organization led and staffed by representatives from those communities and constituencies, we are grateful for the leadership of First Lady Tammy Murphy in recognizing the important role of community doulas as a necessary approach to ensure birth equity. We are proud to partner with her and New Jersey state agencies to provide community doula support, leadership development, and advocacy to improve outcomes for African American/Black and other infants in our state."

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