

First Lady Tammy Murphy Celebrates Signing of Doula Access Bill

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Legislation Ensures Doulas' Access to Hospitals and Birthing Facilities to Accompany Pregnant Mothers

TRENTON – First Lady Tammy Murphy today celebrated Governor Phil Murphy's signing of [S-4119/A-5739](https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2022/S4500/4119_R2.PDF) (https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2022/S4500/4119_R2.PDF), which ensures every mother has the right to a doula in a hospital or birth center. On November 20, 2023, the First Lady held a roundtable discussion at [University Hospital in Newark](https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/562023/approved/20231120a.shtml) (<https://www.nj.gov/governor/news/news/562023/approved/20231120a.shtml>) to discuss maternal and infant health progress in New Jersey and announce the introduction of the bill in the Assembly. The bill unanimously passed both houses on January 8, 2024 before reaching the Governor's desk.

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.

"Evidence shows that doulas help reduce birth complications, lower rates of C-sections, improve mental health, and provide overall essential support and advocacy during the birthing process, making them an indispensable part of a mother's health care team," **said First Lady Tammy Murphy**. "Today's bill, which ensures doulas are afforded the respect they deserve as a critical care team member with access to birthing hospitals and centers, prioritizes the health of New Jersey's mothers and is another significant step toward our goal of becoming the safest and most equitable state in the nation to deliver and raise a baby. I am incredibly grateful to our many partners who have supported the work of Nurture NJ over the years – none of our accomplishments, including today's bill signing, would be possible without their collaboration."

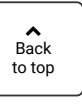
"Doulas play an essential role in a birthing person's care team, providing support that has been demonstrated to reduce maternal mortality disparities," **said Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Kaitlan Baston**. "Through the Doula Learning Collaborative, we are working to train and increase the workforce of community doulas and community health workers to support families throughout pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. I am excited that birthing people will have increasing access to doulas in hospital settings as a result of this legislation."

In the six years since Governor Murphy took office, several steps have been taken to promote doula services and program. Today's bill signing addresses two key 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 the 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 through First Lady Tammy Murphy's Nurture NJ initiative, Governor Murphy and legislative partners have taken several steps and included millions of dollars of funding towards doula services and programs. The Governor's 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 of Nurture NJ and the NJ Department of Health has resulted in the training of over 250 new doulas in the heart of communities most impacted by high maternal mortality.



The primary sponsors of this bill are Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz and Assemblywoman Shanique Speight. Other prime sponsors of the bill include Senator Nellie Pou as well as Assemblymembers Shavonda Sumter, Annette Quijano, Verlina Reynolds-Jackson Senators. Co-sponsors of the bill include Senator Renee Burgess, Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt, Assemblywoman Eliana Pintor Marin, Assemblywoman Lisa Swain and former Assemblywoman Gabriela Mosquera. Former Assemblywoman Mila Jasey was also a supporter of the bill before her retirement in December 2023.

"We should know what our rights are, and all of the services that are available before, during, and after giving birth," **said Senate Majority Leader Ruiz.** "Having access to a trained professional who is completely focused on the well-being of the mother is critical. The Administration and Legislature have been keenly focused on improving the maternal health outcomes of all women, and we must continue to make investments in our hospitals and the organizations that have proven to elevate those efforts."

"Supporting doulas is part of supporting women and combatting maternal and infant mortality," **said Senator Pou.** "Doulas can help a mother follow their birth plan and avoid unnecessary, potentially dangerous interventions, such as C-Sections for low-risk pregnancies."

"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 signing 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. As a former public health nurse and long-time lactation consultant, I know that the bill signed today, 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," **said Former Assemblywoman Mila Jasey.**

"The signing of S4119/A5739 will guide the normalcy of a Doula as part of the birth team in NJ's hospitals. It has been challenging navigating different hospitals, to support clients, when some hospitals were "making-up" the policies depending on who was on staff when I arrived. Having a person to communicate with or policy availability on a website will help clients/patients and doulas. I feel this will also help facilitate communication with Healthcare Providers/staff and Doulas," **said Tonique Griffin, Doula, Maternal and Child Health of Northern New Jersey.**

"This new legislation strengthens and enhances access for doula care in all 21 counties in NJ so women and families can be assured their doula can be part of their birth experience," **said Jill Wodnick, Doula, Childbirth Educator and Maternal Health Policy Expert at Montclair State University.**

"Governor Murphy's signing of Senate Bill 4119 reaffirms the significance of doulas as trained professionals who play an important role in the medical team. It is crucial to have written policies and procedures that support a patient's choice to engage with a doula throughout the state, to strengthen our system of care and improve birth outcomes for all women. Most importantly, it empowers women to take an active role in the way they want to experience one of the most significant events in their lives - becoming a mom. As an organization working closely

with doulas and birthing persons, we are grateful for the opportunity to have our Safer Childbirth Cities Coordinator, Uzo Achebe, and Sarah Stecker, our External Relations Manager, recently testified to educate about their experiences in the doula space, as advocates for the BIPOC communities they serve. We are proud of the progress we have made in the state of NJ in recent years, and we look forward to educating our doulas as well as our clients about this new law," **said Maritza I. Raimundi-Petroski, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, Prevention Programs, and Community Engagement, The Children's Home Society of New Jersey.**

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