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November 14, 2023

Dear Commissioner Donna Miller,

I am writing to offer my staunch support for your budget amendment supporting \$1 Million in funding for Doula/Social Support Services to improve Maternal Morbidity /Mortality rates for women in Cook County.

Doulas are trained to work as advocates during the prenatal and post-partum period. They provide critical emotional and informational support and contribute to improved maternal outcomes. For mothers facing uncertain challenges with childbirth, parenting, infant growth and development and their own emotional needs, the role of a doula has proven to be instrumental in providing hands on guidance and information during the multiple stages of the reproductive process. Doulas are partners, confidants, and physical and emotional support warriors.

Providing financial support for the implementation of doula programing would be a huge step in helping to bridge the gap in health equity for women in Cook County. Achieving equity begins with providing resources based on individuals needs to achieve a state of physical, mental, and social well-being.

Doulas often take on tasks that even the most well-intentioned clinicians do not have time to do. Evidence based studies have shown that doulas can help lower the likelihood of Caesarean birth, lower the incidence of low birthweight infants, ease anxiety during the labor process, be a communications advocate, promote breast feeding and provide other evidence based useful resources.

Low-income women are at a higher risk of poor birth outcomes, specifically women of color, with Black women being especially vulnerable.

Doula care can help to combat some of the disparities in maternal health, in particular, the impacts of racism and racial bias by providing and being an advocate for culturally appropriate and patient centered care.

Illinois, in HB 158, has taken action to expand Medicaid coverage of full spectrum doula care. Cook County Health System should be one of the first health systems to devise programming to provide Doula and Social Support services to help improve maternal morbidity and mortality rates for women in Cook County.

Sincerely,

Denise Gilbert, MSN, RN

Chief Nursing Officer

Cook County Department of Public Health