

SEAN SCANLON
STATE COMPTROLLER



TARA DOWNES
DEPUTY COMPTROLLER



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE of the STATE COMPTROLLER
165 Capitol Ave.
Hartford, CT 06106

Testimony in support of:

HB 7214: An Act Concerning Maternal Health

Senator Anwar, Representative McCarthy Vahey, Senator Somers, Representative Klarides-Ditria, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for raising and affording me the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 7214: An Act Concerning Maternal Health.

The bill before you today would require the establishment of a perinatal mental health task force that would conduct a comparative analysis of perinatal mood and anxiety disorder treatments along with an examination of the current state of perinatal mental healthcare programs/workforce development. The bill would also require the Department of Public Health (DPH) to publish an annual maternity care report card that would look at the quality of such care given by birth centers/hospitals both quantitatively and qualitatively. Finally, the bill instructs DPH to study the potential challenges and benefits that would make hospitals more doula friendly.

Research on various aspects of maternal health reveals widespread disparities. For example, babies born to Black women are twice as likely to have low birthweight compared to those born to White women (12.5% vs. 6.3%). Also, studies show that black mothers are 2.1 times more likely to be afflicted with severe maternal morbidity (such as perinatal mood and anxiety disorders) than their white counterparts. Doulas are an excellent resource to help counter these inequities. A large analysis of over 15,000 births showed that doulas had a statistically significant effect on reducing the length of labor, lowering the pain experienced during childbirth, and lessening the likelihood that a cesarian section or the use of forceps would be needed.

Throughout 2023 and 2024, my office convened a “Healthcare Cabinet,” which brought key policymakers, stakeholders, practitioners, and advocates together to discuss healthcare challenges facing various demographic populations across Connecticut. The cabinet was made up of subcommittees based on those population groups who sought solutions to these challenges, which include potential legislation or restructuring current efforts.

Addressing maternal health disparities was a recommendation spearheaded by our Urban Equity and Disparities Subcommittee. They called for our state to devote more resources into closing these disparities. The bill’s report card requirement would be an excellent tool to hold healthcare providers accountable in ensuring an equitable quality of care. The Subcommittee also supported the studying of maternal morbidity. By looking at perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, this is a

step in the right direction. Finally, The Subcommittee recognized the importance of doulas throughout pregnancy. Making hospitals more doula friendly would help to alleviate stress on our state's maternal healthcare system.

By passing HB 7214, we will send a strong message that our state is committed to equity in all maternal health outcomes irrespective of what zip code a person comes from. Creating a report card system to monitor our maternal healthcare providers along with studying morbidity and supporting our doulas is a significant step in the right direction.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 7214. I look forward to working with members of the committee on this issue this session.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Scanlon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sean" being more prominent than the last name "Scanlon".

Sean Scanlon

State Comptroller