



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

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CLERK OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

NATHAN FLETCHER

CHAIR

SUPERVISOR, FOURTH DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

13

DATE: March 1, 2022

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

DEVELOPMENT OF A DOULA PILOT PROGRAM THAT ADDRESSES BIRTHING HEALTH DISPARITIES WHILE PRIORITIZING EQUITY AND COMMUNITY-BASED CARE (DISTRICTS: ALL) (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black birthing people are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white birthing people.¹ Rates are also disproportionate among Indigenous individuals and other people of color. Many of these deaths are preventable and are due to various contributing factors, including lack of access to appropriate and high-quality care, missed or delayed diagnoses, and lack of knowledge among patients and providers. Doulas, individuals who are trained to provide guidance and support to birthing people during labor and following birth, can significantly improve health outcomes.² Doulas can effectively address birthing health disparities by providing focused care and support, but there is a lack of access to doulas for birthing individuals who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color. Some of the reasons for this include cost, lack of access to adequate health care, and an absence of providers from these populations.

To help bring greater doula access to birthing people who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, the Doula Pilot Program seeks to overcome these barriers by contracting with community-based doula businesses to provide services during pregnancy, for birth and delivery, and postpartum care. This program will enable these organizations to serve more individuals at no cost to the clients, train more doulas to serve the community, and promote better health outcomes.

Today's proposal outlines guidelines to be utilized as the framing for the Doula Pilot Program. These guidelines were developed after community feedback sessions with interested stakeholders to ensure that the Doula Pilot Program accomplishes its goal of addressing birthing health disparities while prioritizing culturally appropriate, diverse, and community-based care.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/features/maternal-mortality/index.html>

² <https://www.expectingjustice.org/resources/community-doula-care-providers/>

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RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to implement a Doula Pilot Program that incorporates the guidelines outlined in this Board Letter.
2. In accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, and Administrative Code 401, authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to issue a Competitive Solicitation and, upon successful negotiations and determination of fair and reasonable price, award a contract or contracts, and to amend existing contracts, for services associated with implementation of a Doula Pilot Program.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Black and Indigenous individuals and people of color face a higher likelihood of serious health complications from pregnancy and giving birth. Multiple factors contribute to these disparities, such as lack of access to quality healthcare, underlying chronic conditions, structural racism, and implicit bias. Access to doulas has been shown to improve healthcare outcomes for birthing people, but due to barriers around cost and access, this service is not accessible for many. To ensure those who are most impacted were provided an opportunity for input, my office met with and solicited feedback from community leaders instrumental in advocating for the program. These stakeholders shared that to be successful, the Doula Pilot Program must be rooted in equity and focus efforts on impacted communities using community-based organizations doing the work.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year 2021-2023 Operational Plan in the Health and Human Services Agency for the one-year Doula Pilot Program. If approved, today's recommendation will result in costs and revenue of \$400,000 from Fiscal Year 2021-22 through Fiscal Year 2022-23. The funding source for this request is one-time Intergovernmental Transfer Revenue (IGT) from the California Department of Health Care Services. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

The doula community is represented by many small business owners. Today's action supports small businesses and empowers individuals by creating a program that builds capacity in our region and that is centered around training individuals within the community to help other community members before and after giving birth and prioritizing small, community-based organizations engaged in the work.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black birthing people are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white birthing people.³ Rates

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/features/maternal-mortality/index.html>

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are also disproportionate among Indigenous individuals and other people of color. Many of these deaths are preventable and are due to various contributing factors, including lack of access to appropriate and high-quality care, missed or delayed diagnoses, and lack of knowledge among patients and providers. Individuals who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color also have an increased risk of pregnancy complications, including preterm birth, gestational diabetes, preeclampsia, and high blood pressure.⁴ Doulas can effectively address birthing health disparities by providing focused care and support, but there is a lack of access to doulas for birthing people who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

Doulas, individuals who are trained to provide guidance and support to birthing people during labor and following birth, can significantly improve health outcomes.⁵ These outcomes include supporting a healthy pregnancy, decreasing the number of cesarean sections (C-sections), lowering the rate of epidural and pain medication use, increasing healthy birth outcomes, increasing breastfeeding rates, and decreasing rates of postpartum depression. Doulas are effective because they are a constant presence throughout the labor and birthing process and can help empower birthing people to seek the care and treatment they need.⁶

However, not all birthing people have access to a doula. Birthing people must often cover the costs of a doula out-of-pocket or are often limited in their healthcare options for a doula provider. This lack of access for many individuals presents a substantial barrier.

Local community-based organizations and numerous individual Black doulas and midwives have been doing the work in the community to address these birthing health disparities and advocate for better care, but the need far outweighs the resources currently available. These stakeholders identify that full-spectrum care is essential to the success of the program. Full-spectrum care is care that is trauma-informed and prioritizes accessibility, inclusivity, and anti-racist practices. Doula services under this type of care includes lactation support, postpartum support, birth plan preparation, childbirth education, and education on comfort measures in labor and sibling preparation.

The County of San Diego has shown an increasing commitment to addressing health disparities in recent years. In January 2021, I was proud to bring forward with Vice Chair Vargas a resolution that declared Racism a Public Health Crisis. This initiative, which was supported unanimously by this Board, stated, “racism underpins health inequities throughout the region and has a substantial correlation to poor outcomes in multi-facets of life.” Additionally, ongoing work was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the reality that the pandemic was disproportionately impacting communities of color.

The County of San Diego has been a regional leader supporting perinatal and infant health initiatives for impacted families. In 2018, the State established the Perinatal Equity Initiative (PEI) that established funding and directed counties to develop interventions and bring awareness to higher rates of poor birth outcomes and inequities among Black birthing individuals. The San

⁴ <https://www.consciouspregnancy.ca/bipoc>

⁵ <https://www.expectingjustice.org/resources/community-doula-care-providers/>

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3647727/>

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Diego PEI works with the San Diego Black Infant Health Program (BIH), which offers social support, stress management, and empowerment through prenatal and postpartum groups and one-on-one sessions—to help birthing individuals understand their risks and try to reduce them.⁷

Additionally, the Maternal, Child, and Family Health Services (MCFHS) branch of the Public Health Services department, in the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, implements both the BIH and PEI programs and has worked collaboratively with First 5 San Diego and other partner community organizations to support healthy birth outcomes. MCFHS leads the Family Support Collaborative with the American Academy of Pediatrics and the County's Office of Nursing Excellence. This collaborative consists of home visiting and other family support programs that aim to serve the most at-risk pregnant and parenting individuals with children ages birth to three years of age.

In support of and to further expand these efforts and following years of advocacy from community members, included in the County of San Diego Operational Plan 2021-2023, adopted in June of 2021, was an allocation of \$400,000 to create a pilot program to increase access to doula services for at-risk families to help address birthing health disparities. This program can help address the need by expanding care for more birthing people and training additional doulas to exponentially increase impact.

To help bring greater doula access to birthing people who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, the Doula Pilot Program seeks to overcome barriers by contracting with community-based doula businesses to provide services during pregnancy, birth and delivery, and postpartum care. This program will enable these organizations to serve more individuals at no cost to the clients, train more doulas to serve the community, and promote better health outcomes. While the direct service to assist birthing people is central to this program, an additional critical component must be to engage and train new doulas in order to adequately amplify the impact and lead to more sustainable outcomes for communities.

Today's proposal outlines guidelines developed after consultation with community leaders in impacted communities to ensure that the Doula Pilot Program accomplishes its goal of addressing birthing health disparities while prioritizing culturally appropriate, diverse, and community-based care.

Pilot Program Guidelines

To assure that the Doula Pilot Program addresses birthing health disparities while also prioritizing equity and community-based care, the competitive solicitation will have program guidelines that are tailored to obtain the maximum amount of participation and opportunities for:

- Organizations with demonstrated experience providing services to birthing people who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color.
- Diverse and traditionally underrepresented businesses for which proactive outreach is encouraged, such as organizations that are owned and operated by individuals who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

⁷ <https://blacklegacynowsd.com/about/>

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- Organizations that are able to offer culturally-responsive doula training and/or certification to individuals who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color.
- Existing small, community-based San Diego County organizations.

To ensure the most significant impact, the County should use existing County programs and initiatives and partnerships with community organizations to provide targeted community outreach and advertisements about the program.

Data collection is instrumental in ensuring that programs operate and perform effectively. Collection of survey data by participants in the Doula Pilot Program, including by the organizations that will operate the program, will inform future policy decisions. Data on the program's effectiveness, the experience of the participants, demographics of participants, and whether the funding is adequate to cover the costs of the providers, should all be a part of this reporting. The results of these surveys should be shared with the Board of Supervisors. Additionally, throughout the duration of this program, my office will continue to meet with community stakeholders to receive feedback.

This program can save lives and improve the health and wellness of birthing people and their families. The program must be implemented to support the needs of these impacted communities.

I urge your support.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action to direct the Chief Administrative Officer to create a Request for Proposal for the Doula Pilot Program that incorporates the guidelines in this Board Letter supports the Equity and Community Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan by addressing birthing health disparities while prioritizing culturally appropriate, diverse, and community-based care.

Respectfully submitted,



NATHAN FLETCHER
Supervisor, Fourth District

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A