

Dear esteemed members of the committee

My name is Joseph Bennett, and I'm a high school teacher here in Syracuse, NY. I'm here today to testify in strong support of legalizing and licensing Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs). I've witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of our nation's maternal mortality crisis, a crisis that disproportionately affects Black families in our very community.

The statistics are frankly, horrifying. As you know, the United States has the highest maternal mortality rate of any developed nation. We're talking about approximately 23.5 deaths per 100,000 live births. But these numbers aren't just statistics; they represent real lives – mothers, daughters, sisters – lost far too soon. And the disparity is even more alarming: Black women are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women. This isn't just a health issue; it's a social justice issue.

In my classroom, I see the ripple effect of this crisis. I've had students who have lost their mothers to preventable pregnancy complications. I've seen the heartbreak, the confusion, and the profound impact it has on families. These children are robbed of their mothers, and our community is robbed of their potential. These are not abstract concepts to me; these are my students, my neighbors, my community.

One of the key factors contributing to this crisis is the lack of access to comprehensive, culturally competent maternity care. Many women, especially in underserved communities, struggle to find providers who understand their needs and concerns. This is where CPMs can play a vital role.

CPMs are trained and nationally certified healthcare professionals who specialize in providing holistic, woman-centered care during pregnancy, labor, and postpartum. They focus on empowering women to make informed decisions about their care, emphasizing natural childbirth and minimizing unnecessary interventions. Critically, CPMs often serve communities where access to obstetricians is limited, providing a crucial alternative for families who may otherwise have limited options.

Legalizing and licensing CPMs will not only increase access to maternity care, particularly for marginalized communities, but it will also offer families more choices. It will provide an opportunity for women to experience childbirth in a way that aligns with their values and beliefs. It can also help reduce the burden on our already strained healthcare system.

Some may argue that CPMs are not as safe as physicians. However, studies have shown that when CPMs are integrated into the healthcare system and work collaboratively with other providers, they can provide safe and effective care. In fact, in some studies, CPM care has been associated with lower rates of interventions and better outcomes for both mothers and babies.

This isn't about replacing doctors; it's about expanding options and ensuring that all women have access to the care they deserve. It's about recognizing that every woman deserves a safe and healthy birth experience, regardless of her race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Legalizing and licensing CPMs is a crucial step towards addressing the maternal mortality crisis in our country. It's a step towards ensuring that every mother has the chance to see her child grow up. It's a step towards building a healthier and more equitable future for all of our families. I urge you to support this legislation.

Thank you.