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COUNTY OF MAUI
**COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS
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October 12, 2021

**STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FROM THE MAUI COUNTY
COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

Support for Amendments to Act 32

The Maui County Committee on the Status of Women (MCCSW) stands in full support of the proposed changes to Act 32 proposed by the Hawai'i Homebirth Collective after working on the Hawai'i Home Birth Task Force. The requests laid out in the amendment are reasonable and should be supported as midwives provide an important and valuable role in our communities.

MCCSW believes that passing Act 32 into law (requiring licensure of midwives in the State of Hawai'i) was too harsh and restrictive and unreasonable for many midwives who have been practicing for years and even decades. The numerous data presented by midwives and others showed no justification for such strict regulations, in fact, when compared to hospital births, the outcomes for home births with midwives showed better results.

The proposed amendment seeks to recognize "Traditional Midwives," who are trained according to culture with experienced midwives. The amendment would also recognize "Direct-entry Midwives," to honor the paths of non-traditional and non-certified midwives who have had many years of training with mentors and with peers in addition to formal and informal training and education.

MCCSW believes in the abilities of women to give birth to their babies and we support safe, healthy options for all birthing moms. Act 32 takes away the options for women who would choose a homebirth with a Traditional or Direct-Entry Midwife.

The amendments suggested will have no impact on the already Certified Professional Midwives but would create a way to recognize the training and expertise of Traditional and Direct-Entry Midwives and take away sanctions and punishments that are unnecessary and are another way to oppress women and our reproductive rights. Women have been giving birth to babies since the beginning of time, it is unnecessary to overregulate birth without documented justification.

The Hawai'i State Legislature passed this law based on individual horror stories of bad home birth outcomes that were terrible, but not the norm. Report after report from Hawai'i and from across the country was submitted that showed home birth to be safer than hospitals and midwives didn't push their own experiences with horrible outcomes happening in hospitals because the power structure doesn't flow that way. There are new reports, especially during the pandemic, of the value of having home birth as an option.

Bill 32 as it stands disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous and all People of Color (BIPOC) who are statistically proven to have worse maternal outcomes.

Furthermore, MCCSW recognizes that the wants and needs of women living in Hawaii are diverse. It is a fact that the State of Hawai'i faces unique challenges due to its geographical makeup as an island chain as well as its isolated location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The availability of birthing options and resources already varies widely by island. For example, women on Moloka'i and Lana'i are forced to move to either O'ahu or Maui a month before their due date, at their own expense, to give birth in a hospital on another island without their support systems.

Increasing professional pathways for Traditional Midwives and Direct-Entry Midwives may have more significant benefits for BIPOC households, as data shows BIPOC populations are statistically proven to have improved maternal outcomes when working with midwives for prenatal, birth, and postpartum care. Given that 74.5% of the population of Hawai'i is non-white (2019 American Community Survey), it is critical that the women in this State have a diverse range of options that will enable safe birthing care.

This bill disproportionately affects BIPOC midwives and other birth workers because there is no midwife certification program in the State so there is a huge geographical disadvantage for midwife candidates in Hawai'i. In addition, if midwifery students are able to participate in a program on the continent, there are very few preceptors available to supervise the students locally, particularly on neighbor islands. Most of these preceptors are white, intensifying the effect on BIPOC students.

This law is part of the continuum of government overreach into women's reproductive rights. Women have a right to choose not to go to the hospital where outcomes often include a higher rate of unwanted medical interventions, cesarean operations, evacuation births and even forced sterilizations, particularly again in BIPOC women. These are the reasons more women in Hawai'i are seeking midwives and home births so they can have better control over what happens to them while they are giving birth.

Birth is a natural process and has been happening in home settings since the very beginning of time. Birth is an easy money maker for hospitals and the medical systems because it nearly always happens naturally without intervention, but can rake in the billing with each and every intervention. This is the real reason for government regulation and professionalization of a natural, human event.

The Hawai'i State Legislature did not consider the data, testimony and information provided by midwives fairly in comparison to the information provided by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)

After meeting for nearly a year, the Hawai'i Home Birth Task Force submitted a diminished version of the information to the Legislature. Not included were numerous studies and data verifying the safety and positive outcomes of home birth in Hawai'i presented by the Hawai'i Homebirth Collective, as well as testimony from Cultural Practitioners and organizations from Hawai'i and from other states and countries supporting the valuable work being done by midwives.

Women should be allowed to choose how and where they have their babies without government regulations. Homebirth and midwifery must be an option, especially for BIPOC women and babies.

Cultural and Traditional Midwives as well as Direct-Entry Midwives need to be allowed a pathway to practice and ultimately be recognized as professionals and experts in their fields in the State of Hawai'i.

Sincerely,



Kate Griffiths

Chair,

Committee on the Status of Women