

February 7, 2024

Sen. Liz Boldon
Minnesota Senate Building, Rm 3201
95 University Avenue W.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Boldon,

I am writing as the University of Minnesota School of Nursing nurse-midwifery program director in support of HF 1342 /SF 1743 (MN Certified Midwife Practice Act). The creation of the Certified Midwife (CM) license in Minnesota would address maternal health care disparities and diversify the licensed midwifery workforce in the state. The United States is experiencing a crisis in maternity care. Although we spend more money on pregnancy and childbirth than any other high-income country in the world, we are leading our global peers in maternal morbidity and mortality. The disparity worsens for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC); most deaths are preventable. Furthermore, the US (along with Canada) have the lowest overall supply of maternity care providers (e.g., midwives and obstetricians) with rural areas experiencing an even more acute shortage.

Midwifery care is associated with high-quality outcomes for women and newborns and lower costs due to fewer unnecessary, invasive, and expensive interventions. The World Health Organization recommends the midwifery model of care as an evidenced based approach to preventing and minimizing maternal mortality. In fact, midwifery care is associated with lower rates of stillbirth, preterm birth, and cesarean section while also improving patient psychosocial well-being (Renfrew, 2014). Vedam and colleagues (2018) noted that increasing access to midwives is a “feasible strategy” for improving maternal outcomes. In the same study, the researchers scored integration of midwives into the healthcare system and assigned each state a score (out of 100). The state of Minnesota scored 50/100 points (<https://www.birthplacelab.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Minnesota.pdf>). One of the reasons for the low score was a lack of CMs in the state. The Commonwealth Fund recently noted “While the reasons behind the high U.S. maternal mortality rate are multifaceted, our findings suggest that an undersupply of maternity providers, especially midwives, and lack of access to comprehensive postpartum supports are contributing factors.” The fact is that midwives save lives and we need more of them.

The University of Minnesota School of Nursing celebrated 50 years of educating and training nurse midwives in 2023. The majority of our graduates reside in and go on to practice within the state of Minnesota.

At this time, we only train nurse-midwives because the state of Minnesota does not offer licensure for CMs. There is evidence from other states that the CM licensure increases the diversity of the workforce which is a critical component to improving health outcomes for BIPOC people (Greenwood, Hardeman, Huang, & Sojourner, 2020). Although we have actively worked to recruit BIPOC and rural dwelling midwifery students, a large barrier is the necessity to become a nurse prior to attending midwifery school. This financial burden disproportionately impacts BIPOC students making recruitment efforts more challenging. Passage of HF 1342/SF 1743 (MN Certified Midwife Practice Act) will be the first step to opening the CM pathway in the state and

will allow the University of Minnesota to consider expansion of our current graduate midwifery programs. I am proud to stand alongside my University of Minnesota academic colleagues Dr Rachel Hardeman and Dr Katy B Kozhimannil in support of this bill.

In summary, as the director of the nurse-midwifery program at the University of Minnesota School of Nursing, I am writing to enthusiastically support HF 1342/SF 1743 and the creation of Minnesota CM licensure. I would be happy to further discuss my support of this bill and the importance of expanding access to high-quality midwifery for Minnesota mothers and newborn. You can reach me at msaftner@umn.edu or 218-491-5059. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to continuing this discussion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ms Saftner', written in a cursive style.

Melissa A. Saftner, PhD, CNM, FACNM
Clinical Professor and Midwifery Program Director
University of Minnesota School of Nursing