

Legislative Update - MARCH 2018

Now that the Washington State 2018 legislative session is over, there is both much to celebrate and much work to do!



We had a record turnout on Midwives' Lobby Day: More than 80 licensed midwives, midwifery students, and healthcare consumer/advocates braved the rain and showed up in Olympia on January 18th. If you haven't already seen the video that captured the highlight of the day--and, some might say, one of the most memorable moments in MAWS' history—take a look! [You can view the video here.](#)

We got to sit in the House gallery and witness the unanimous vote in support of HB 2016. This bill, which the Governor signed into law last week, ensures that pregnant and postpartum inmates in Washington state prisons and jails will have access to midwives and doulas. Several legislators spoke movingly from the floor and sang the praises of the midwives who'd been there for the births of their babies or grandbabies. Then, the Speaker Pro Tempore asked us to stand, and MAWS received a standing ovation from the entire WA State House of Representatives. It was epic. Much gratitude and appreciation to EmPATH, Surge Reproductive Justice, Open Arms, the Simkin Center at Bastyr University, and Legal Voice for working with us to get this important piece of legislation passed.

You should also check out this terrific article on the impact this legislation will have:

<http://www.mothering.com/articles/washington-state-to-provide-pregnant-inmates-access-to-midwives-and-doulas/>



Governor Inslee signs HB 2016 into law, surrounded by Rep. Richard DeBolt, who introduced the bill, and the advocates who supported it.

Meanwhile, over in one of the Senate hearing rooms, MAWS President, Neva Gerke, testified on SB 6304, a bill to guarantee continued funding in WA State for the CHIP program, which the federal government had threatened to de-fund. SB 6304 and its companion bill in the House, HB 2660, would not only have ensured that all children in Washington would have healthcare coverage; it also would have guaranteed prenatal care coverage for **all** childbearing people in

the state. In the end, this bill did not need to go forward because the federal government reinstated the CHIP program.

In addition to talking about these bills with legislators and their aides, we asked for support for an amendment to the budget proviso that passed last year, maintaining the \$525 cap on the midwifery licensing fee. Since 2009, when this fee cap went into effect, the licensed midwifery workforce in Washington has grown by 40%. Due to misinformation that we'd received last year from the Department of Health, the amount we'd requested from the legislature during the 2017 session was insufficient to cover the shortfall in the Midwifery Program budget at the DOH. For the most part, members were very receptive to our request that an additional \$50,000 be allocated this year to fulfill on the intention of the proviso, and we are pleased to report that the final supplemental budget for 2018 included this allocation.

We also spent time in our meetings with legislators seeding the concept of title protection for birth centers, sharing the legislative language we have drafted to protect the terms "birth center," "birthing center," and "childbirth center" in statute, and conveying the thoughtful process we are engaging in with other stakeholders, including the WA State Hospital Association (WSHA). The rationale for this effort is two-fold: 1) to protect consumers – we believe that families choosing a birth center for their care should be able to know what kind of care is actually offered in such a facility and what kinds of outcomes are achieved there; and 2) to preserve the integrity of the birth center model of care. The WSHA representatives we spoke with prior to session indicated that they understand our concerns, but asked MAWS to wait until 2019 to introduce a bill so that they could have time to educate their members about the rationale for such legislation and give hospitals an opportunity to voluntarily re-brand as necessary. We agreed to do so—and heard from quite a few legislators how much they appreciated this collaborative approach.

One of the senators we met with, however, was highly motivated to take action on this matter this year. Sen. Phil Fortunato introduced SB 6579, even though he knew it was not at all likely the bill would get a hearing this session—and it didn't. But, according to Sen. Fortunato, introducing the bill this session was a way to convey to WSHA and the hospitals throughout the state that MAWS is serious about this effort and that we have legislative support.

During the interim, we'll be working closely with the Government Affairs team at WSHA as we build our strategy for re-introducing the title protection bill next session. We will also be encouraging birth centers to host tours for legislators in their districts. This will be an opportunity for members to learn about the unique model of care offered in these settings and the outcomes associated with this care.

We are also planning to work with Sen. Karen Keiser and the same coalition of organizations that helped pass HB 2016 on legislation that would expand programs in Washington prisons and jails allowing inmates to remain together with their babies. For more information about these programs—in Washington and other states—you can read this excellent article: <http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/politics-government/article140712783.html>