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Two New Bills Introduced to Expand Access to Midwifery Care in California

Legislation Will Expand Pregnancy Care Options for Medi-Cal Patients; Increase Access To Midwifery in Areas With Limited Providers

SACRAMENTO – In an effort to expand health care options for pregnant women in California, two new bills were introduced today. The first, SB407, will expand pregnancy care options for families on Medi-Cal by including licensed midwife services under a component of the program. The bill is authored by Senator Mike Morrell, R-Rancho Cucamonga, co-authored by Senator Lois Wolk, D-Davis, and sponsored by the California Association of Midwives.

A second bill, SB408, will expand midwifery care – particularly in rural and other underserved areas – by allowing ‘midwife assistants’ to legally assist licensed midwives at births. Typically, two providers attend each birth, but licensed midwives are scarce in some areas of the state. This bill would allow a specially trained ‘midwife assistant’ to legally assist a licensed midwife, expanding the reach of existing providers. The bill is authored by Senator Mike Morrell, R-Rancho Cucamonga and sponsored by the Medical Board of California.

“Few experiences in life are more personal and intimate than childbirth,” said Morrell. “Expectant mothers of all income levels should have options when it comes to deciding where and how they bring their children into the world. Adding licensed midwives to the list of pregnancy service providers available to these patients makes sense.”

Currently, Medi-Cal recipients are eligible for the Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program (CPSP) which provides educational and psychosocial support to patients, as well as childbirth and breastfeeding education. These services are the cornerstone of midwifery practice, but women on Medi-Cal are currently unable to access the care of licensed midwives. SB407 would give pregnant Medi-Cal patients the option to seek these specialized services from licensed midwives.

The [*Listening to Mothers III: New Mothers Speak Out*](#) survey of 2400 women who had recently given birth in a hospital in the United States in 2012-2013 found the nearly two thirds of women who plan to have future children would consider giving birth outside of the hospital.

In the survey 25% of respondents said they would definitely want to give birth in a freestanding birth center, while 11% said they would definitely want to give birth at home. A further 39% said they would consider giving birth in a freestanding birth center, and 18% would consider giving birth at home. These numbers represent the tremendous interest among consumers of maternity

services in out-of-hospital birth options including freestanding birth centers and home births. In California, licensed midwives are the only maternity care provider type who specialize in out-of-hospital birth.

“Licensed midwives are committed to providing midwifery services to all families that choose birth centers or home birth,” said Sarah Davis, Legislative Chair for the California Association of Midwives. “Together, these bills will expand our ability to serve all women in California.”

Consumers in California are particularly supportive of both pieces of legislation. “Families in California want options in birth services,” said Tanya Smith-Johnson, President, California Families for Access to Midwives. “Families who access Medi-Cal, rural families, families in areas with a shortage of licensed midwives – they all deserve access to a variety of birth options.”

Out-of-hospital births is a less expensive, less invasive birthing option that could save the system as much as 80 percent on individual hospital births, which are the leading cause of hospitalization in the U.S.

[California Association of Midwives](#) is a non-profit professional organization representing midwives statewide. CAM membership includes midwives, students, and a supporting membership of other healthcare professionals and consumers. CAM is working to create a vital, collaborative perinatal healthcare system.

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