



**Testimony Submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Health
In support of H.1948/S.1332, An Act relative to out-of-hospital birth access and safety
By Janice Goodell, LWVMA legislative specialist, Health Care
May 28, 2019**

This bill would require all midwives practicing in out-of-hospital settings to become licensed and regulated. Licensure improves safety of home births. The Certified Professional Midwife credential (CPM) is the benchmark against which standard U.S. maternity care should be judged. It is recognized in 32 states and more states have legislation pending. Currently, Massachusetts regulates only Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs) who predominantly practice in hospitals. There is no state oversight of midwives who provide out-of-hospital care.

A 2012 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report found that, between 2004 and 2009, the number of home births in the United States grew by 29%. In Massachusetts, the number of home births grew by 34% over the same period. A 2005 CDC study found low-risk women who give birth at home under the care of certified professional midwives have outcomes equal to those of low-risk women who give birth in hospitals, with far fewer costly interventions, including a five-fold decrease in cesarean sections. The current cesarean section rate in the United States is around 33%. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a rate of 15%. Preliminary studies by the WHO indicate that midwife-led care can reduce cesarean section rates and reduce medical costs. CDC studies and studies published in *Women's Health Issues*, the official journal of the Jacobs Institute at George Washington University, show that there is a reduced rate of preterm births and low birth weights with midwife-led care, two of the primary contributing factors to increased rates of infant mortality, racial and ethnic disparities in birth outcomes and high costs associated with long term care.

Currently, home birth care is limited to those who have the means to pay out of pocket. Licensure is a prerequisite to insurance coverage, including Medicaid coverage, for an out-of-hospital birth. This bill will help make available the full range of midwifery care and access by improving the ability of families across the Commonwealth to safely take advantage of their right to choose the type and location of their maternity care. About 40% of births in Massachusetts are currently covered by Medicaid/Mass Health, and this bill would make midwives available to these women who want a home birth.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, asks for your support of this bill that supports quality assurance, improves consumer protection, increases access to health care options and reduces costs.

Thank you for your consideration.