

## Maternal Health Services

# Overcoming Fear with a Doula's Help



Our Maternal Child Health staff recently guided a family through a challenge that underscores the vital role we play in supporting families, especially those navigating the complexities of immigration, culture, and healthcare systems.

A mother and her partner who had recently immigrated to New Jersey were wary of delivering at their local hospital. This fear led to a crisis of uncertainty that jeopardized the welfare of both the mother and her unborn child. With previous difficult births behind them, and only days after hearing news that birthright citizenship was being questioned, the mother was determined to deliver at home—without medical guidance or support.

She asked our doula to assist her in a home birth, though that is not the role of a community-based doula. Community doulas are trained to provide non-medical support to birthing parents before, during, and after childbirth. The situation became urgent when

labor began at 4 a.m., and at 7 a.m., the mother reached out to the doula for help. Since community doulas are not permitted to serve as medical providers, our dedicated doula rushed to the home and stood outside, offering support through the phone, guiding them gently toward the safety of medical professionals.

Under the direction of her management team, the doula encouraged the family to call emergency medical services (EMS) for a safer delivery. But despite this guidance, the parents refused to allow the EMS team inside. After leaving, the EMS team was called again when the parents' mindset shifted. They finally agreed to the transport, and by 2p.m., the mother was taken to the hospital.

The doula, showing incredible perseverance and dedication, traveled separately to remain by their side. After 12 hours of steadfast support—through every labor contraction and moment of doubt—the mother finally gave birth that evening. The doula didn't stop there, returning the following day to assist with breastfeeding and providing the nurturing care they needed.

This couple's story highlights the risks posed by fear and misinformation, and the urgent need for us to continue educating our community—and ourselves—about the importance of safe, medically supported births. It's a reminder that our role is not just to provide physical care but to be a beacon of compassion, support, and reliable information when families need it most.