

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

ISSUED BY: Southern Birth Justice Network, Inc. (SBJN)

ISSUE DATE: May 9, 2025

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In December 2023, the Health Foundation of South Florida and a coalition of Miami healthcare organizations formed an historic collaborative program, the Black Maternal Infant Health Equity Collaborative (BMIHEC) to address some of the critical needs of the Miami birthing community regarding maternal and infant health. The BMIHEC is a partnership between Southern Birth Justice Network, Metro Mommy Agency, YWCA and Magnolia Birth House, supported by the generous resources of the Health Foundation of South Florida. Our goal is to train, certify and integrate 50 full spectrum doulas into the hospital system at Jackson Main, a certified Level 2 trauma care center, by 2026.

According to the original goals of the program, when the BMIHEC started over a year ago, the collaborative was able to quickly begin its monumental work because of the dedication of its collaborative community partners. Beginning with providing physician staff training at Jackson Health, the BMIHEC Program began implementing and integrating trained and certified doulas into Jackson Memorial Hospital's labor and maternal wards. Highly skilled and effective, the doulas were trained by SBJN and received additional training and practice rotations from Metro Mommy Agency and Magnolia Birth House. The YWCA of South Florida has provided access for doulas to receive entrepreneurship training through their women's empowerment program, WE 360°, and will also help pilot best practices in screening birth families at high risk for unmet health-related social needs – such as housing, economic stability, and childcare – while linking them to local service providers.

“Improving the health of families requires innovative strategies in healthcare, and beyond,” said Kerry-Ann Royes, President and CEO of YWCA South Florida. “By bringing YW’s programs and partnerships to the Collaborative, we are able to expand upon the care that doulas and midwives offer with critical wrap-around services to ensure families can continue to thrive beyond the post-partum period.”

The program is well on the way toward its goal, and pacing for training and certification of the doulas is on track. In this first year of the pilot program, BMIHEC has:

- staffed Jackson Hospital's Main maternity floor with 13 available doulas under a screened volunteer status;

- conducted three provider education sessions, reaching more than 100 healthcare providers at The Women's Hospital at Jackson Memorial; and
- invested significant program resources to complete and obtain Medicaid credentialing for the birth justice doulas to better serve low-income patients with the goal of creating a well-trained doula workforce that would lead to permanent placements of doula candidates at Jackson to provide ongoing maternal and family care for the community.
- Stationed on the Labor and Delivery floor, Birth Justice doulas provide physical and emotional support to their laboring clients and advocate for birthing people to avoid unwanted and unnecessary interventions and invasive procedures.
- Preliminary data showed an 86.4% vaginal birth rate for a sample of 22 births supported by BMIHEC doulas.

After the initial kick-off reception celebrating these accomplishments, Nadirah Sabir, one of the program's Birth Justice Doulas remarked "what a privilege it is to work to help evolve our hospital systems and create a healthier environment for both patient and practitioner."

As we move into year two of the program, we are committed to the issues of maternal and infant health and to improving the lives of mothers and their babies in the Miami community. We will continue to work with the Health Foundation of South Florida and healthcare providers who have expressed their support and interest in being involved in the program. We look forward to forging new partnerships and expanding the program in the years ahead. We've just welcomed a new cohort of doulas and intend to expand services to make doula care available to families county-wide. Esther McCant, CEO of collaborative member Metro Mommy Agency, remarks, "We are grateful to have the Health Foundation funds to expand our Doula Mentorship program through this collaborative work. It has always been a dream of mine to see the doula workforce respected and established. We hope to grow our agency, expanding and sustaining funding opportunities for more community-based doulas through the MOMCHA Program."

Collaborative partner Southern Birth Justice Network is committed to building the Birth Justice movement to uphold reproductive and human rights for all people, specifically birthing people who deliver at hospitals all over Miami-Dade County. In a previous Miami Times article, Ms. Amani said, "What we hope is that this (BMIHEC) will lead to an improvement of outcomes," she said. "We'll see less morbidity, less mortality, more sacredness, more joy, more compassion. That just leads to stronger families – and that leads to stronger communities."

"Black maternal death rates have been steadily rising in the United States for decades," the Health Foundation of South Florida wrote in an open letter in April 2024. It continued, "The history of structural and institutional racism which has resulted in inadequate access to care, maternity care deserts, lack of health insurance, and implicit bias, are at the root of the Black maternal health crisis."

Moreover, hospital closures like the Labor & Delivery, Mother Baby and NICU services at North Shore Medical Center this past February 2024 are creating maternity deserts throughout South Florida. These closures leave more people at risk of maternal and infant deaths and morbidities, which have risen across the state of Florida in recent years. A year into this project, we're more focused than ever on our three-year mission to do better by our most vulnerable community members.

We also look forward to the day that collaborations between hospitals and community-based, birth worker-led organizations like Magnolia Birth House, Metro Mommy Agency and Southern Birth Justice Network become the norm, so that we may confidently recommend our client families give birth as supported as possible by a pregnancy/maternity care team that includes both midwives and doulas.

A local client supported by a Birth Justice doula while giving birth at Jackson Health shared, "I was provided with an experienced doula who was not only in tune with my needs during labor but also brought great energy and knowledge to guide me during and after birth."

Studies show that having a doula in the birthing room reduces the need for pain and inductions medications and reduces the rate of C-sections.

We are thrilled to expand the BMIHEC into the community to work with more clinics, hospitals, birth centers and health care providers in our continued efforts to reduce unnecessary interventions that lead to high rates of cesarean birth, and to eliminate the persistently high mortality rates for birthing people and infants in Black and Brown communities in South Florida.

Collaborator, Tamara Taitt of Magnolia Birth House, concluded, "We will continue to use all available resources to uplift midwifery and doula care, address the social determinants of health, and provide mutual aid to support families in need in South Florida. We know that doulas make a difference!"

For further information:

Find more about our [Birth Justice Bill Of Rights](#).

If you need to see a midwife, [make an appointment](#) with our Mobile Midwife Clinic. For more information about our programs and services please follow [@southernbirthjustice](#) on Instagram, birth justice on X, or visit [southernbirthjustice.org](#) and use the contact form if you are in need of support or would like to support the movement through volunteer work.

To refer a pregnant or postpartum woman or birthing person to a BMIHEC doula, visit [www.momcha.org](#)

References:

“Shifting the Power Balance: Creating Health System Accountability Through Trusted Community Partnerships”. March 2023.

By Hadley Fitzgerald and Zackiya Grant-Knight, Center for Health Care Strategies;
and

<https://www.chcs.org/resource/shifting-the-power-balance-creating-health-system-accountability-through-trusted-community-partnerships/>

“SBJN and Metro Mommy Agency In The News”: Human Rights Watch, October 16, 2024, “[Witness, Ally, Advocate, Climate Worker: Doula Care for Justice in Maternal Health in Florida.](#)”

The Independent, October 25, 2024, “[Pregnancy Is Already Deadlier For Black Women. Abortion Bans Will Only Make It Worse.](#)”

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