

How Doulas Can Help Disabled Pregnant People

Brandie Bentley, PhD

Taylor Banks

May 20, 2026

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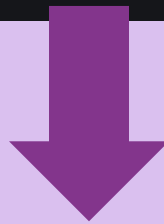
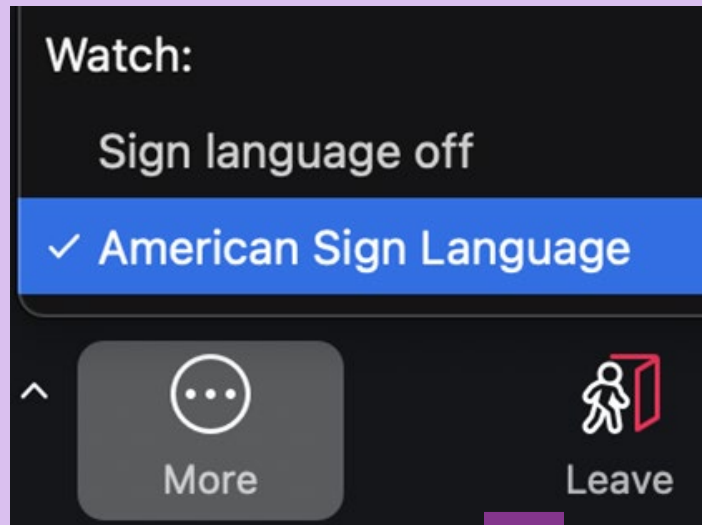
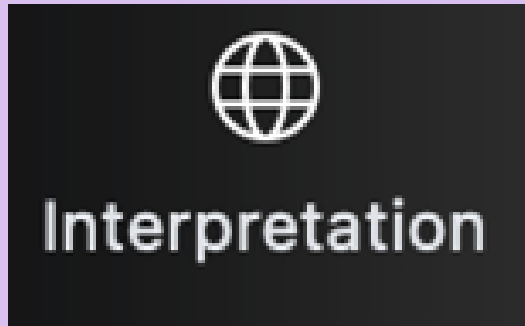
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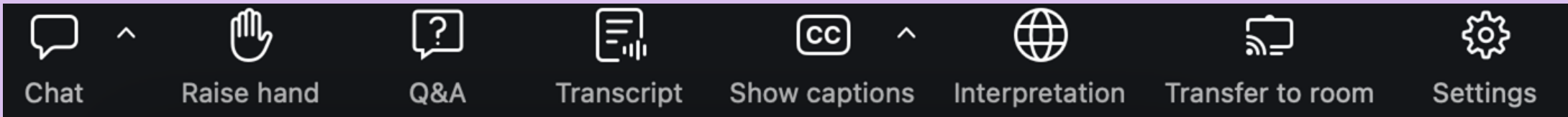
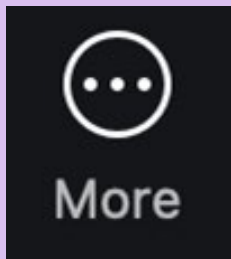
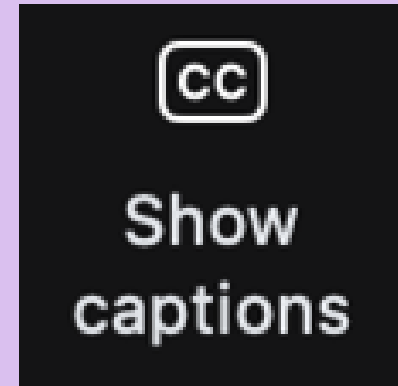
National Center for
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ASL & Captions

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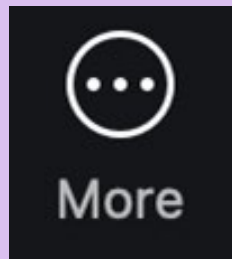
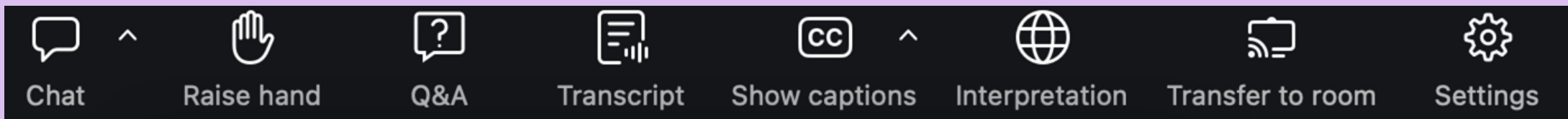
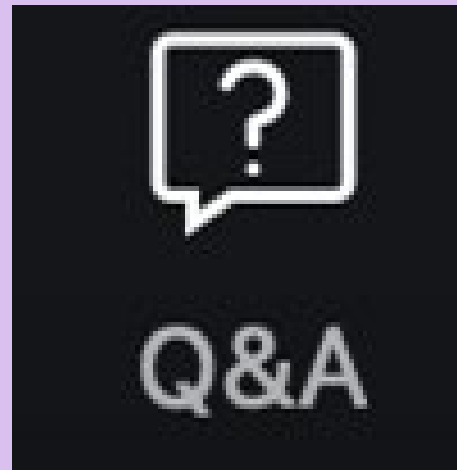


Zoom Closed Captions



Asking Questions

Please use the Q&A to submit questions for our panelists



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Meet our Speakers

Brandie Bentley



Taylor Banks



MAY 20, 2026

How Doulas Can Help Disabled Pregnant People

Taylor Banks & Brandie Bentley, PhD, MSW

Session Overview

20 min

Setting the Stage

Barriers disabled birthing people face, what doulas do, and why this conversation is urgent

30 min

Conversation with Taylor

Discussion exploring Taylor's firsthand experience of doula care

10 min

Open Q&A

Questions from the audience to both presenters

Chat Activity- Who Is in the Room?

In the chat, share:

1. Your role (provider, family member, researcher, advocate, or something else)
2. One word that describes what brought you here today

Example: "Doula; curiosity" or "Parent; hope"

What We Hope You Leave With

- A clear understanding of the barriers disabled people face across the perinatal continuum
- Knowledge of what doulas are, what they do, and what makes care disability-informed
- Awareness of Medicaid expansion and why doula access is an equity issue
- Insight from a disabled birthing person's firsthand experience
- Practical ideas you can bring back to your own work, practice, or advocacy

Disability and Pregnancy

26%

of U.S. adults
have a disability

1 in 6

pregnant people
identify as disabled

Documented Gaps

- Healthcare systems are rarely designed with disability access in mind
- Provider training in disability-affirming perinatal care is limited or absent
- The consequences disproportionately impact those already navigating the most barriers

Environmental Barriers

- Exam tables, labor & delivery rooms, and clinical equipment designed without disability
- Limited adaptive positioning support during labor & delivery
- Transportation barriers and inaccessible scheduling prevent prenatal care attendance

Communication Barriers

- Written-only materials, no plain-language or visual alternatives, Augmentative and Communication (AAC) devices not supported
- Fast-paced environments allow limited processing time
- Providers may interrupt, redirect, or address companions instead of the patient, undermining autonomy

Provider Attitudes & Training Gaps

- Providers may assume disabled people are asexual, cannot make informed decisions or incapable of parenting effectively
- Non-medically necessary cesareans used more often, driven by assumption, not clinical need
- Providers report low confidence and inadequate training, yet formal disability training is rarely offered

The Fourth Trimester

- Higher postpartum depression rates
- Home visiting, discharge instructions, and lactation education rarely in accessible formats
- Parents with disabilities disproportionately referred to child protective services and lose rates

WHAT IS A DOULA

A doula is a trained, non-medical professional who provides continuous physical, emotional, emotional, and informational support before, during, and after childbirth.



Emotional Support

Continuous encouragement, comfort, comfort, and reassurance



Advocacy

Help communicate needs and preferences with medical staff



Information

Explainin procedures, options and help help with birth planning



Family Support

Guidance for partners and family members throughout the process



Physical Comfort

Positioning, breathing techniques, and and pain management support



Postpartum Care

Support after delivery including infant infant feeding, newborn care, parenting parenting support, and recovery

A Doula Is Not...

- A medical provider
- A decision-maker
- Just for natural birth
- A luxury

What the Evidence Shows

Research on doula support consistently documents improved outcomes across birthing populations:
populations:

- Reduced cesarean rates and shorter labor duration
- Fewer requests for pain medication and medical interventions
- Increased breastfeeding initiation and duration
- Higher birthing person satisfaction and sense of agency
- Reduced rates of postpartum depression
- For Medicaid recipients and communities of color, doulas improve cultural concordance and reduce disparities in respectful care



Participants described doulas as filling a role that the medical medical system had consistently failed to provide: someone who someone who listened without judgment, communicated in ways in ways that worked for them, and advocated when they could could not.

— Evans et al. (2024)

Medicaid Coverage

Who Benefits Most

- Medicaid recipients are disproportionately people, people of color, low-income households

Why This Matters Now

- This policy shift creates a historic opening for equity
- For the first time, consistent one-on-one support is available at scale to those who need it most

What's Still Needed

- Coverage alone is not enough
- Doulas must be trained in disability-informed care
- Hospitals must be accessible
- Providers must be held accountable

What Makes Doula Care 'Disability-Informed'?

Follow the Client's Lead

Every disabled person's needs are different, never assume.

Accessible Communication

Plain language, regular check-ins, and time to process.

Proactive Accommodation

Advocate for access needs before labor begins.

In-the-Room Advocacy

Speak up when a disabled person is dismissed, overlooked, or denied accommodations.

Continuity & Trust

Relationship built over prenatal visits.

Disability Justice

Collective access, and full participation as rights, not accommodations.

How I Support Disabled Families

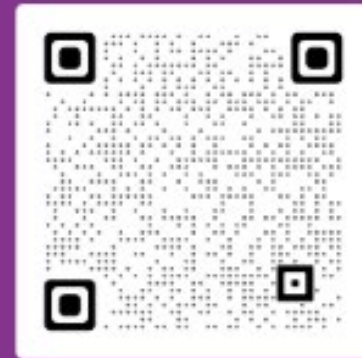
- Ask openly about care and support needs
- Attend prenatal appointments; assist with mobility and physical access
- Bring comfort items, music, and sensory supports tailored to each family
- Adjust lighting and environment in labor and postpartum spaces
- Note-taking, scheduling, and organizational support
- Birth and postpartum planning centered on disability-specific needs
- Postpartum home visits to assess and address accessibility barriers
- Support with coordinating therapy and specialist support as desired

Are you a disabled parent with a story of how a doula helped with your pregnancy?



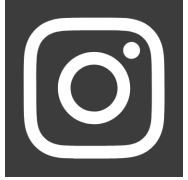
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