

Massachusetts Department
of Public Health



Doula Certification

Program Guidelines

March 23, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Overview of Department Certification Program Standards	3
1.1. Purpose	3
1.2. Definition of Terms.....	3
1.3. Scope of Practice of Certified Doulas	3
2. Certification as a Doula	4
2.1. Eligibility Requirements.....	4
2.2 Application requirements.....	4
2.2 Review of Applications	6
2.3. Terms of Certificates	6
2.4. Renewal of a Certificate	7
3. Complaints, Investigations, Agency Action	7
3.1. Complaints Against Doulas	7
3.2 Grounds for Refusal to Certify or Renew Certification	8
4. Recordkeeping and Confidentiality.....	9
4.1. Doula-Client Agreement.....	9
5. Severability	9
5.1: Severability Standards	9

1. Overview of Department Certification Program Standards

1.1. Purpose

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) aims to improve the health of pregnant and postpartum people, caregivers, and families by encouraging the development of a high-quality and robust doula workforce and helping to integrate doulas into the health care and public health systems to ensure that doulas are available to those who want them. These standards provide a detailed overview of the doula certification program within DPH. By offering a voluntary certification program for doulas, DPH is establishing minimum standards for education, training, and experience to ensure the integrity and competency of doula services in Massachusetts and to promote health, wellness, and safety.

1.2. Definition of Terms

- *Continuing education*, planned learning experiences that are designed to augment the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of a Certified Doula.
- *Department*, the Department of Public Health.
- *Certified Doula*, a person who meets the eligibility requirements set out by the Department and has been duly certified by the Department and who maintains such active certification. A Certified Doula provides non-clinical educational, emotional, advocacy, and physical support to pregnant and birthing people and families before, during, and after birth based on culturally competent, evidence-based practices.
- *Clinical Services*, the direct provision of healthcare, including prevention of illness or disease, diagnosis, treatment, therapeutic services, rehabilitative services, palliative services or medication management.
- *Perinatal*, the period encompassing pregnancy, labor, and delivery, through 12 months following the end of pregnancy, inclusive of all pregnancy outcomes. For adoptive parents of infants, the period in which the adopted infant is younger than one year of age.
- *Personal Information*, any information concerning an individual which, because of name, identifying number, mark or description can be readily associated with a particular individual.
- *Postpartum*, the period following the end of a pregnancy regardless of the outcome of the pregnancy, from the end of the pregnancy through the following 12 months.

1.3. Scope of Practice of Certified Doulas

Certified Doulas provide educational, emotional, advocacy, and physical support to pregnant and postpartum people and families before, during, and after birth based on culturally competent, evidence-based practices. No doula, certified or otherwise, shall provide any clinical services to a client while practicing in their capacity as a doula. Doulas work as part of the team that provides care to pregnant and postpartum people and their families and may provide recommendations or referrals to qualified professionals as needed.

Certified Doulas may have reasonable access to their client throughout their client's labor experience to provide comfort measures, including, but not limited to, massage, aromatherapy, and positioning their client to best support labor progression, whilst prioritizing the safety of the laboring person and fetus. Certified Doulas may provide basic

lactation support and education to their clients. To address additional client needs outside of the scope of a Certified Doula, the doula may refer clients to a qualified professional.

2. Certification as a Doula

2.1. Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible to be certified, a doula must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- (1) Be at least 18 years old;
- (2) Have successfully completed a MassHealth-related requirement. This requirement is intended to support understanding of the MassHealth Doula Services Program and does not require applicants to be enrolled as a MassHealth provider. This may be met through one of the following:
 - (a) Completion of trainings provided by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, as required for MassHealth doula provider eligibility under 130 CMR 463.404(A)(2); or
 - (b) Completion of a DPH-developed, on-demand webinar on benefits, support available for, and opportunities inherent in being a MassHealth doula provider.
- (3) Have demonstrated proficiency in the six competencies listed below, either through the Formal Experience Pathway (see Section 2.2, Subsection 7) or the Training Pathway (see Section 2.2, Subsection 8).
 - (a) Maternal anatomy and physiology during the perinatal period, including basic fetal growth and development in each trimester of pregnancy.
 - (b) Common medical interventions during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period.
 - (c) Common potential complications associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and the Postpartum period, including but not limited to:
 - i. Pregnancy termination, and infant loss;
 - ii. Newborn feeding;
 - iii. Mental health conditions, including perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs);
 - iv. Substance use disorder (SUD); and
 - v. High blood pressure.
 - (d) Labor and delivery comfort measures.
 - (e) Best practices for supporting clients in advocating for their needs and making informed decisions using a trauma-informed approach.
 - (f) Basic newborn care, including the fundamentals of breastfeeding/chestfeeding.

2.2 Application requirements

An application for certification as a doula shall be made in a format approved by the Department. The applicant shall submit the following:

(1) A copy of the applicant's government-issued identification, that includes that applicant's full name and photograph (e.g., a driver's license or identification card, such as a Massachusetts Identification Card or passport). Applicants may submit a passport issued by a country other than the United States, however no other form of national identification from another country will be accepted.

(2) Documentation as may be required pursuant to 803 CMR 2.00: Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) to authorize the Department's receipt of criminal offender record information to the extent allowed by law.

(3) An attestation that the applicant has read, understands, and will abide by the Doula Code of Conduct.

(4) Proof of completion of a MassHealth-related requirement. This requirement is intended to support understanding of the MassHealth Doula Services Program and does not require applicants to be enrolled as a MassHealth provider. This may be met through one of the following:

(a) Completion of trainings provided by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, as required for MassHealth doula provider eligibility under 130 CMR 463.404(A)(2); or

(b) Completion of a DPH-developed, on-demand webinar on benefits, support available for, and opportunities inherent in being a MassHealth doula provider.

(5) Proof of proficiency in the six competencies listed below, either through the Formal Experience Pathway (see Section 2.2, Subsection 7) or the Training Pathway (see Section 2.2, Subsection 8).

(6) An attestation that the applicant has read, understands and will abide by these standards including the process for investigation and discipline.

(7) **Experience Pathway.** A doula may demonstrate required competencies without needing to complete a formal doula training program. The eligibility criteria for the Experience Pathway are:

(a) Demonstration of competency as a doula through recommendations from 3 different former clients for whom the prospective Certified Doula provided doula services (either paid or volunteer) within the last 5 years; and

(b) Recommendations from at least 2 licensed healthcare providers including but not limited to, physicians, midwives, nurses, social workers, who have observed the applicant providing doula services within the last 5 years; and

(c) Attestation that the candidate has completed formal or informal education in the 6 areas of competence listed in Section 2.1, Subsection 3.

(8) **Training Pathway.** This is a way for a doula to demonstrate required competencies through the completion of a formal doula training program. The eligibility criteria for the training pathway are either of the following:

(a) Demonstration of competency as a doula through completion of a formal doula training program in the last 3 years. Applicants applying through this pathway must provide a certificate of completion or other proof of doula training(s) attended, and/or proof of doula certification by a doula-certifying organization and a completed attestation stating that the completed formal training(s) covered the required competencies listed in Section 2.1, Subsection 3. 3.

(b) For doulas who completed a formal doula training program more than 3 years before their initial certification, the Department requires applicants to demonstrate their competency as a doula through completion of at least 5 hours of continuing education within 12 months before submitting their certification application. Applicants must provide a certificate of completion or other proof of training(s) attended, and attest that the completed formal training(s) covered the required competencies listed in Section 2.1, Subsection 3. 3.

(9) MassHealth Pathway. This is a way for a doula to demonstrate required competencies through confirmation of current valid MassHealth doula provider status. Acceptable proof must be submitted as the applicant's MassHealth provider ID number and a proof of applicant's MassHealth provider enrollment status, with the applicant's name clearly visible. Applications for MassHealth Pathway will be accepted until March 31, 2028.

(10) State Reciprocity Pathway. This is a way for a doula to demonstrate required competencies through confirmation of current valid Doula certification status in states approved for reciprocity. Acceptable proof must be submitted as the certificate from approved states of reciprocity with the applicant's name and date of certification clearly visible. Applications through the State Reciprocity Pathway will be accepted until March 31, 2028.

2.2 Review of Applications

Applications that are incomplete or missing any of the required documentation will not be processed. The Department shall notify an applicant in writing of any deficiencies in their application and any additional information requested. If the requested additional information is not received by the Department within 90 calendar days from the date of said written notice, the application will not be acted on by the Department. An applicant or Certified Doula is required to maintain their current email address and current mailing address on file with the Department through the e-licensing system.

2.3. Terms of Certificates

Doula certification will remain valid for at least 2 years following approval of certification. Doula certification will expire at the end of each odd-numbered calendar year, and Certified Doulas may renew their certification during the renewal period which begins 60 days prior to the expiration date. A Certified Doula who fails to renew by January 15 of every even-numbered year following the expiration of their certification will be required to reapply for doula certification in Massachusetts.

2.4. Renewal of a Certificate

(1) Renewal of a Current Certificate. A Certified Doula who holds a current certificate and has completed all continuing education requirements for renewal of the certificate may apply to renew such certificate by submitting a complete Doula Recertification application form and application that includes the following items:

- (a) Documentation as may be required pursuant to 803 CMR 2.00: Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) to authorize the Department's receipt of criminal offender record information to the extent allowed by law;
- (b) Completion of the Doula Continuing Education Form documenting 5 continuing education hours; and,
- (c) An attestation that the Certified Doula has read, understands, and agrees to abide by the Doula Code of Conduct.

(2) Renewal of an Expired Certificate. A Certified Doula who holds a certificate that has expired less than 2 years prior to application for renewal and has completed all continuing education requirements for renewal of the certificate pursuant to these program standards, may apply to renew such certificate by submitting a complete application as specified by the Department and the following items:

- (a) Documentation as may be required pursuant to 803 CMR 2.00: Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) to authorize the Department's receipt of criminal offender record information to the extent allowed by law;
- (b) Completion of the Doula Continuing Education Form documenting 5 continuing education hours; and
- (c) an attestation that the Certified Doula has read, understands, and agrees to abide by the Doula Code of Conduct.

(3) A Certified Doula who holds a certificate that expired more than two years ago must submit a new initial application.

3. Complaints, Investigations, Agency Action

3.1. Complaints Against Doulas

(1) Purpose

The purpose of this section is to outline the procedure for reviewing complaints related to the certification of doulas. This process ensures that all complaints are handled in a fair and impartial manner in accordance with established policies and procedures.

(2) Basis for Complaint Review

Upon receiving a complaint, the Department will assess whether the complaint constitutes a violation of the Doula Code of Conduct, scope of practice, or other applicable certification

standards. Complaints that do not allege conduct within the Department's authority or that do not implicate certification standards may be closed without further action.

(3) Complaint Review Process

- (a) If a complaint alleges a potential violation of the Code of Conduct or certification standards, the Department assesses the nature and severity of the alleged violation.
- (b) In determining appropriate next steps, the Department evaluates complaints on a case-by-case basis and may consider additional contextual factors, including but not limited to severity, actual or potential harm, intent, pattern, risk of recurrence, prior history, and feasibility of correction.
- (c) If the Department determines that disciplinary action may be appropriate, it shall provide written notice to the Certified Doula which includes the reasons therefore and provide the opportunity for the Certified Doula to submit written information or documentation for the Department's consideration.
- (d) A complaint may be considered substantiated if the investigation reveals facts that show a violation of doula standards by a preponderance of the evidence, which means that the facts are more likely than not true.

3.2 Grounds for Refusal to Certify or Renew Certification

(1) In reviewing an applicant's initial or recertification application to the Doula Certification Program, the Department may refuse to issue or renew a certification, based on one or more of the following grounds:

- (a) Failure to meet certification requirements;
- (b) Failure to comply with these standards, the Certified Doula's code of conduct and/or scope of practice;
- (c) Failure to comply with any rule, advisory ruling, or policy adopted by the Department with regard to Certified Doulas;
- (d) Continuing to practice as a DPH-certified Doula after the expiration, revocation, suspension, surrender, or retirement of their certification or after they have agreed to refrain from performing activities requiring certification;
- (e) Fraudulently procuring a certification or renewal of a doula certification;
- (f) Failure to cooperate with a request from the Department in connection with a matter under review including but not limited to an investigation, complaint or application;
- (g) Discipline imposed by another jurisdiction against any certificate, or other authorization for reasons substantially similar;
- (h) Engaging in behavior that is likely to have an adverse effect upon the health, safety, or welfare of patients or public.

(2) Options when Department issues a refusal to certify or renew certifications

- (a) If the Department refuses to issue or renew a certification, the affected person shall be notified in writing of the reasons for the Department's action and of their right to appeal.
- (b) Where denial or refusal to renew is based solely on the failure of the applicant to file timely an application, the Department may act without first granting the applicant or Certified Doula written appeal process.

(c) Unless otherwise provided, the Certified Doula must submit a written appeal, including any additional documentation or information for the Department's review within 14 calendar days of receipt of notification of Department action. Failure to submit this request in a timely manner will result in waiver of the appeal. The Department may, in its discretion, prescribe an expedited timeline for response.

(d) Following review of the written appeal materials, the Department may affirm, rescind, or modify its previous decision regarding certifying or renewing a certification.

4. Recordkeeping and Confidentiality

4.1. Doula-Client Agreement

- (1) Certified Doulas must maintain a signed client agreement form for each pregnant, postpartum or adoptive person and/or family. These records must be kept for a minimum of 6 years after the date of service, regardless of repeated clientele. Each agreement should at a minimum describe the scope of doula support, clarify that doulas provide non-clinical services and do not offer medical care or advice, and outline expectations regarding confidentiality between the doula and client.

5. Severability

5.1: Severability Standards

Any section of these standards that are declared to be invalid for any reason shall be severed and shall not affect any other portion which shall remain in full force and effect.