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Direct-Entry Midwives in Alaska and Other States

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You asked about the creation of the board of direct-entry midwives in Alaska. You also wished to know how many states license and regulate midwifery, and whether they do so through a stand-alone board. Additionally, you wished to know the salary range for direct-entry midwives.

There are two main categories of midwives in the U.S., nurse-midwives, who are trained in both nursing and midwifery, and direct-entry midwives, who typically are not trained in nursing.¹ Direct-entry midwives are sometimes referred to as licensed midwives, lay midwives, or certified professional midwives.² Currently, 30 states, including Alaska, license or regulate direct-entry midwives.

Briefly, direct-entry midwives:

- Are not required to be nurses;
- Take multiple routes of training/education, which typically include some combinations of apprenticeship, workshops, formal classes or programs, etc.;
- May or may not have a college degree;
- May or may not be certified by a state or national organization;
- Are not required to have any practice agreement with a doctor in most states;
- Have various educational and licensing requirements, depending on the state;
- Typically maintain autonomous practices outside of institutions; and
- Train and practice most often in home or out-of-hospital birth center settings.³

Alaska Board of Direct-Entry Midwives

In 1992, House Bill 382—codified at AS 08.65.010, et seq.—created the Alaska Board of Certified Direct-Entry Midwives. Since that time, the board has been licensing and regulating Alaska’s midwives. When the bill was being debated, there was considerable resistance in some quarters—especially in the medical community. Nonetheless, the bill was enacted and the board has now been in place for nearly 25 years. The board consists of two members who are certified direct-entry midwives, one physician who has an obstetrical practice or has specialized training in obstetrics, one certified nurse midwife, and one public member.

Background

In 1985, Alaska lawmakers enacted House Bill 335, which provided for the registration of “lay midwives” (SLA 1985 Ch 33). Essentially, this law directed the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) to establish a Midwives Working Group. The group was to propose regulations to the commissioner of DHSS regarding registration, training, educational

¹ Nurse-midwives are registered nurses who must receive at least a master's degree in a nursing-midwifery program that is accredited by the American College of Nurse-Midwives. They are licensed in all states.

² In this report we use the title direct-entry midwives.

³ List taken, in part, from Citizens for Midwifery, a national entity promoting midwifery, at <http://cfmidwifery.org/midwifery/faq.aspx>.

requirements, and disciplinary measures for lay midwives. The department was to report on these proposed regulations to the Alaska Legislature. However, for a variety of reasons, regulations were not put into place and the 1985 legislation was effectively not administered for the ensuing six years. During this time, direct-entry midwives continued to practice in Alaska without regulations. Then, in 1992, House Bill 382 was drafted, and eventually enacted, creating the Board of Certified Direct-Entry Midwives.

Should you wish to delve more into the background material pertaining to the creation of the Board of Certified Direct-Entry Midwives, you can review the bill files for HB 382 (and HB 335, in 1985) at www.akleg.gov/library/midwife/. It was from these files that we obtained some of the information provided in this report. Also, Alaska statutes and regulations pertaining to certified direct-entry midwives are available at www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/portals/5/pub/MidwivesStatutes.pdf.⁴

Other States

Currently, 30 states provide for some form of licensure and regulation of direct-entry midwives. Of these, Alaska and six other states—Idaho, New Hampshire, New York, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming—provide licensure and oversight through a freestanding board of midwifery. Nine states—Delaware, Florida, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington—provide licensure through a council/committee on midwifery in conjunction with another licensing agency (Board of Medicine, Department of Health, Board of Nursing, etc.). The remaining 14 states generally regulate midwifery through an existing health licensure body, or require other provider licenses to practice midwifery.

For an in-depth look at state laws pertaining to the scope of practice of direct-entry midwives (including licensing authority), we encourage you to review an 18-page report on the subject produced in 2016 by the American Medical Association at <https://www.ama-assn.org/sites/default/files/media-browser/specialty%20group/arc/direct-entry-midwife-state-chart-practice-information-2016.pdf>. Also, a chart listing the legal status of direct-entry midwives by state is available from the North American Registry of Midwives (NARM) at <http://narm.org/pdf/Statechart.pdf>.⁵

Salary

The average earnings of a direct-entry midwife vary widely by how much the midwife charges per birth, as well as the frequency with which the midwife attends births. Location of the practice, self-promotion efforts, and community standing are all factors affecting the amount of business a midwife conducts. According to the Midwifery Education Accreditation Council, most midwives charge between \$2,000 and \$4,000 per birth, and a relatively busy midwife attends between two and four births each month.⁶ Neither the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nor any other reputable entity that we identified, compile useful data on the salaries of direct-entry midwives in Alaska or nationwide.

We hope this is helpful. If you have questions or need additional information, please let us know.

⁴ Additional information is available at www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/cbpl/ProfessionalLicensing/Midwives/StatutesRegulations.aspx.

⁵ The NARM is dedicated to advancing the profession of midwifery by supporting advocacy efforts for legal recognition at the state and federal level, <http://narm.org/>.

⁶ <http://meacschools.org/education-faq/>.