

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

I write in strong support of H8490, establishing the Noreen Drexel Birthing Center Fund to sustain birthing services at Newport Hospital. The potential closure of this center would impose serious hardship on Newport County families. Newport County is geographically isolated, and traveling off-island for labor and delivery carries real medical risk, particularly during emergencies or severe weather.

Local maternity care is not an optional service. The Newport Hospital birthing center provides essential prenatal, labor and delivery, postpartum, and neonatal care close to home, strengthening continuity of care and long-term health outcomes for mothers and infants throughout the region. Its loss would diminish Newport Hospital's capacity to function as a full-service community hospital.

H8490 proposes a sound, shared-responsibility funding model that partners the State, Brown Health, and the philanthropic community to stabilize operations while long-term sustainability strategies are developed. I urge the committee to support this legislation as a critical public health investment for Rhode Island families.

Respectfully,

Aimee Cardwell