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**LWVRI Written Testimony Submitted in Support of House Bill H8490  
Noreen Drexel Birthing Center Fund Act**

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of Rhode Island, I write in support of H8490, the “Noreen Drexel Birthing Center Fund Act,” which will be heard before the House Finance Committee on May 12.

The League of Women Voters believes that access to healthcare is fundamental to the health, safety, and well-being of communities. The continued operation of birthing services at Newport Hospital is not simply a local healthcare issue; it is a matter of public health, equity, and access for families across Newport County.

Newport County’s geographic isolation creates unique challenges for pregnant individuals and families seeking timely maternity care. Requiring residents to travel off-island for labor and delivery services could create significant hardships, particularly during emergencies, severe weather, or high-risk pregnancies. Maintaining local access to prenatal, labor and delivery, postpartum, and neonatal care is essential to protecting maternal and infant health outcomes.

The League is particularly supportive of H8490’s collaborative and accountable approach. By establishing a shared funding partnership among the State of Rhode Island, Brown Health, and philanthropic partners, the legislation recognizes that preserving essential healthcare infrastructure is a shared civic responsibility. The bill also appropriately emphasizes transparency, long-term planning, and sustainability rather than relying on short-term crisis responses.

Access to local birthing services strengthens families and communities. It supports continuity of care, reduces barriers to healthcare access, and helps ensure that Newport Hospital can continue functioning as a full-service community hospital serving residents and visitors alike.

The strong public response to the possible loss of the birthing center demonstrates how deeply this service matters to the community. H8490 offers a practical path forward that balances fiscal responsibility with the urgent need to preserve essential maternal healthcare services.

We respectfully urge the committee to support H8490 and to recognize the preservation of local maternity care as a critical investment in Rhode Island families and communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Gene Thompson-Grove  
League of Women Voters of Rhode Island