

House Committee on Health and Human Services

State House  
82 Smith St.  
Providence, RI 02903  
9 April 2026

**Re: Testimony in Support of Legislation to Protect the Newport Hospital Birthing Center**

Chair Donovan and Members of the Committee,

I write to express my strong support for the full package of legislation introduced to protect and strengthen access to maternal healthcare in Rhode Island, including the Newport Hospital Birthing Center.

This legislative package represents a thoughtful and necessary response to a situation that has exposed serious gaps in transparency, accountability, and long-term planning for essential healthcare services.

First, I strongly support the bill amending the Hospital Conversions Act ([H7272](#)), which would require any proposal to close, relocate, or significantly reduce services at a birthing center to undergo a rigorous state review process. This includes mandatory financial disclosures, impact analyses on patients and staff, public hearings, and independent expert evaluation. Critically, the bill prohibits approval unless the Department of Health determines that closure is truly unavoidable and would not worsen racial, economic, or geographic disparities in maternal care.

This is a common-sense safeguard. Decisions of this magnitude, affecting maternal and neonatal outcomes, should never occur behind closed doors or without full public accountability.

Second, I support the Rhode Island Maternal Health Improvement and Equity Act of 2026 ([H7626](#)). This legislation takes a forward-looking, systemic approach by establishing a permanent Maternal Health Advisory Board, creating a statewide data and outcome monitoring infrastructure, investing in workforce development, and providing community-based grants to expand access to care.

This bill recognizes that protecting a single facility is not enough; we must build a resilient maternal health system statewide.

Third, I strongly support House Resolution [H8203](#), which would condition state funding to Brown University Health on the continued, full operation of the Newport Hospital Birthing Center. This includes requirements for 24/7 labor and delivery services, adequate staffing, and a prohibition on any actions that would render the facility functionally unavailable, whether through service reductions, diversions, or administrative decisions.

This resolution is particularly important given the significant public investment in our healthcare system. If taxpayer dollars are supporting healthcare institutions, the public has a right to expect that essential services, especially those as critical as maternal care, will be maintained.

At the same time, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the broader context that has made this legislation necessary.

Over the past year, it has become increasingly clear that the future of the Newport Birthing Center has been uncertain not due to clinical or community needs, but due to internal decision-making processes that lack transparency. There is a growing perception in the community that the Birthing Center has, at times, been treated as a strategic asset rather than an essential healthcare service.

The Community Advisory Panel (CAP) offered a meaningful opportunity for public engagement and collaborative problem-solving. I commend those who participated in good faith and worked to identify sustainable solutions. However, the ultimate decision-making process did not fully reflect or rely upon that work, raising legitimate concerns about how community input is incorporated into institutional decisions.

Additionally, I have heard concerning accounts suggesting that individuals within the system may feel constrained in their ability to speak openly about operational realities. A healthcare system functions best when clinicians and staff are empowered to advocate freely for patient care. Any culture that inhibits that openness deserves serious scrutiny.

Taken together, these concerns underscore why this legislative package is so important.

- **H7272** ensures transparency and due process before any closure or reduction of services
- **H7626**: The Maternal Health Improvement and Equity Act ensures long-term system planning and investment
- **H8203** ensures accountability tied directly to public funding

Each bill addresses a different failure point. Together, they form a comprehensive and necessary framework to protect maternal healthcare access in Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support all components of this legislative package and to send a clear message that essential healthcare services must be governed transparently, sustainably, and in the best interest of the communities they serve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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House District 73