

Written Testimony in Support of HR8203, HB7272, and HB7322

Dear Representative Donovan and Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services:

In 2023, I transferred to Newport Women's Health about halfway through my pregnancy on the heels of a particularly distressing experience with a former provider. Given that I was a first-time mom, this experience was incredibly anxiety-inducing for me, which is why the transfer to Newport Women's Health stands out in my mind. Every provider and nurse at Newport Hospital's Birthing Center and at Newport Women's Health treated me with compassion, respect, and dignity and made me feel valued – the complete antithesis of what it often feels like to navigate a healthcare system that so often makes us feel like a number or a statistic. This is why I was particularly outraged when it became clear, last summer, that the future of the Noreen Stonor Drexel Birthing Center at Newport Hospital was in question.

House Bill 7272, introduced by Representative Carson, is incredibly important to ensuring that our communities – not just in Newport County, but across the state – never face the same threat of losing access to this type of essential and critical healthcare again. By requiring the owners of these labor and delivery units to appropriately and directly notify the communities impacted, provide detailed statistics on their services and the patients served, and disclose the financials of said labor and delivery unit – the latter of which, notably, has not been disclosed by Brown University Health in regards to the specific operations and financial performance of the Birthing Center at Newport Hospital – the State can prevent the emergence of maternity care deserts in Rhode Island. (Notably, Rhode Island is only one of eight states in the nation that continues to have full access to maternity care.)

While last week's announcement that Brown University Health will keep the Birthing Center open represents an important step forward, questions remain about Brown's specific plan to ensure the longevity and sustainability of the Birthing Center and exactly how they came up with the \$4.9 million figure that they are seeking from philanthropic and State funds. Nonprofit hospitals receive tax exemptions from the state because they serve a public good. When a large health system with considerable financial resources (like Brown University Health) openly contemplates eliminating essential service lines (like maternity care), the public must ask the question "Are they continuing to serve the public good?" When Lifespan (now Brown University Health) acquired Newport Hospital in the mid-1990s, they entered into an implicit social contract with the Newport County community to provide essential healthcare services to our region. That is why I urge this committee to support House Resolution 8203; if further State funding is given to Brown University Health,

we need the assurance that our taxpayer dollars will be used appropriately to maintain the essential services we need to ensure the health and safety of our community.

Furthermore, given that Rhode Island received a federal Maternal Health Innovation grant in late 2023 to improve maternal health outcomes statewide, House Bill 7322 is imperative to ensuring that all birthing centers and labor and delivery units in the state continue to operate at the highest level, with the needs of all Rhode Islanders in mind. The bill's provision for community-based maternal health access grants also has the potential to strengthen established maternal health infrastructure throughout the state, while expanding care beyond what is currently offered to ensure healthcare equity and access to essential maternal services, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or any other factor.

As the Chair of the Coalition for Newport Hospital Birthing Center and Co-Founder of Moms Over Margins, I'd also like to draw your attention to a white paper published today entitled, "Protecting the Future of Maternity Care in Newport County: How the Noreen Stonor Drexel Birthing Center is Critical to the Health of the Aquidneck Island and East Bay Communities." This report, developed in collaboration with Primary Care for All Americans, SEIU 1199NE, Women's Resource Center, the Newport Health Equity Zone, and Newport Partnership for Families, proves what we've been saying as a Coalition for the last nine months: the Birthing Center at Newport Hospital is essential to the health, safety, and equity of our community. While the full findings and recommendations can be found at the link below, I would like to highlight the following here:

- The Noreen Stonor Drexel Birthing Center provides vital, safe, and high-quality in-hospital maternity care for birthing individuals in Newport County. It is the third-busiest labor and delivery unit in Rhode Island, and the only unit with a consistent straight-A rating in reports released by the Leapfrog Group.
- The Birthing Center at Newport Hospital serves a population more than sufficient to sustain it. It has delivered close to 500 babies annually, with more than 300 births recorded in the first half of 2025 alone. However, with the right marketing, Newport Hospital can likely increase that number, as we found there were 1,165 low-to-moderate risk births in the Newport Hospital service area in 2022 (the last year geographic population data is available).
- The Birthing Center contributes substantially to the economic health of Newport County, contributing over an estimated \$5 million annual in total (direct and indirect) economic impact.

To access the full report, please visit this link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L2ipG8Opl7oWnBBf5AbuCjJK6vNky444/view?usp=sharing>

Thank you to the Committee Members again for your time in taking up these important issues and hearing our concerns and recommendations on this matter. I urge all of you to support House Resolution 8203, House Bill 7272, and House Bill 7322 for the reasons outlined above.

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Cassie Voll

Co-Founder, Moms Over Margins

Chair, Coalition for Newport Hospital Birthing Center