

House Committee on Health & Human Services
Rhode Island State House, 82 Smith St., Providence, RI 02903.

April 9th 2026

Re: Testimony in Support of H8203 Protecting the Newport Hospital Birthing Center, H7272 Protecting Access to Birthing Centers and Maternal Care, H7322 The Rhode Island Maternal Health Improvement and Equity Act

Dear Chairperson Donovan and Members of the House:

I am Stefanie Gallo from Newport, House District one as part of the Doulas of Rhode Island, founded in 2008, representing the voices of over ninety doulas across Rhode Island.

As a community doula, I work for families — not hospitals. I hold a perspective that no physician or administrator has: I attend births in every hospital, with every type of provider, under every circumstance. I am the only type of birth worker who sees care across the entire spectrum. And because I answer to families, not institutions, I can speak freely about what I witness.

I am here to tell you that closing the Newport Birthing Center would be a tragedy — and I mean that in the most literal sense. People will be harmed. Some may die.

For those who have never given birth, you need to understand one fundamental truth: birth does not wait. Like many involuntary bodily functions, your body is in control. You cannot tell it to wait while you drive over two bridges.

As a doula, I am almost always the first call when a mother is in labor. I fully expect that if this center closes, I will be catching babies on the bridges, on Route 4, and on 95. When those babies arrive in my hands instead of in the hands of an infant resuscitation team, some of them will not survive. When those mothers climb into an ambulance not equipped to manage a postpartum hemorrhage, some of them will not survive either.

The weight of every one of those outcomes will rest squarely on Brown University Health.

Newport fire chief, Harp Donnelly has voiced that Newport does not have the emergency resources to manage a surge of ambulance calls over two bridges to ensure every mother and baby arrives safely. That's if the bridge is even open. That gap will be measured in lives.

Until you have stood at the bedside of a nurse with trembling hands giving rescue breaths to a baby less than a minute old. Until you witness a mother go ash-gray from blood loss, too weak to hold her child, you cannot fully comprehend what you are authorizing by closing our birth center.

This is not a financial spreadsheet. These are lives. Brown University Health knows the consequences. Every person in this room who supports this closure knows the consequences.

I urge you to vote in favor of H8203, H7272 and H7322. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Stefanie Gallo
Perinatal Birth Doula & Certified Lactation Consultant
41 Sheffield Ave, Newport, Rhode Island 02840
1st Congressional District