

Steven Sepe

From: Katie Blais <katie.blais@gmail.com>
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To: House Health and Human Services Committee

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To the Chairperson and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

My name is **Katie Blais**, and I am a resident of **Porsmouth Rhode Island**. I am writing today to express my strong support for **H8203, H7272, and H7626**. These bills are not just about policy; they are about the safety, dignity, and health of families across Rhode Island—specifically those of us on Aquidneck Island.

A Tale of Two Births In 2020, I gave birth to my second son, Gus, at the Newport Birthing Center. My experience there was a vital turning point for me. My first birth experience in Miami had left me deeply traumatized, and I approached my second pregnancy with significant anxiety. However, the care and consideration provided by Newport Women's Health and the Newport Birthing Center put me entirely at ease.

Because of the staff's dedication and the center's accessibility, I was able to have a standard, healthy birth without the stress that comes with traveling long distances. Every mother deserves that level of peace and proximity.

The Geographic Reality of Aquidneck Island While I am privileged to own a car and have the means to travel off-island if necessary, many of my neighbors do not. We must consider the physical and logistical reality of our geography:

- **Bridge Vulnerability:** During severe storms, the bridges close. If Newport's birthing services are removed, a laboring mother on this island could be physically cut off from medical care.
- **Infrastructure Hurdles:** Between bridge construction and unpredictable traffic, "off-island" hospitals can be nearly an hour away. In a labor scenario, an hour is an eternity.

Why These Bills Matter

- **H8203:** This resolution ensures that state funding for Brown University Health is tied to the survival of the Newport Birthing Center. It holds our healthcare providers accountable to the communities they serve.
- **H7272:** This act provides a necessary "safety valve." It prevents the abrupt closure of birthing centers without public disclosure and Department of Health approval, ensuring that profit margins never take precedence over public safety.
- **H7626:** By establishing the Rhode Island Maternal Health Improvement and Equity Act, we are finally treating maternal health as the statewide priority it should be.

Closing the Newport Birthing Center will place already at-risk populations at further risk. We should be expanding access to maternal care, not consolidating it until it's out of reach for the most vulnerable among us.

I urge this committee to pass these bills to protect the families of Aquidneck Island and ensure that future mothers can have the same safe, local, and compassionate experience that I had with my son Gus.

Respectfully,

Katie Blais

381 Corys Lane, Portsmouth RI 02871