

Dear Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,

My name is Rebecca Clark.

Briefly, my history is that I was born in CT & attended Salve Regina University, graduating in 1989 with a BA in Psychology & a BA in Criminal Justice. While working at Bradley Hospital, I realized my calling was Nursing. I returned to Salve Regina & graduated with my BS in Nursing, in 1995. I continued my Nursing career at Bradley Hospital, then went to train in a cardiac step-down unit for a few years at The Miriam. But I felt the pull to get back to Newport, & my dream was always Labor & Delivery. I am a 3rd generation Nurse, & advocating for women at such an important time of their lives, was a very large part of my joining The Noreen Stonor Drexel Birthing Center.

I have had the pleasure & blessing of working with childbearing women & children of this community now for more than 25 years. It has brought me IMMENSE joy, and now being there to deliver some infants of women I delivered 20+ years ago, is an amazing thing to be part of. Seeing these patients years later out in the community, with their children, recognizing me & raving about what an incredible experience they had, & how much it meant to them to deliver at our Birthing Center, warms my heart.

Over the years of my nursing career, I've seen many changes. Some good, some bad. Over the past few years, it's become very evident that the state of medicine & health care in RI has become very concerning. The reimbursement rates here in Rhode Island are dismal compared to neighboring states.

I have had two personal experiences with this recently. Last week I went into a personal physician appt, & they asked if I would allow a medical student to be present. Of course, I agreed. In speaking with this student, he explained he was graduating from Brown Medical school this year. When I asked about his future plans, his face fell. The practitioner training him explained to me that this new doctor could not afford to work in Rhode Island. He would be taking a position in Massachusetts. This is atrocious. This is a new brilliant mind, trained in RI, who cannot afford to practice here. He is going to another state, as many doctors are, in droves. It is unconscionable that this is happening.

More serious for me personally, was the VERY real and recent possibility of my beloved Birthing Center unit, at Newport Hospital. The reasoning for the inability to keep us open, was due to cost. Thankfully, after 10 months of advocacy, meetings, and public outcry, Brown University Health has recently announced the decision for The Birthing Center to remain open. But this is not a finite decision. The very real possibility of this beloved community hospital's Birthing Center being closed due to financial constraints, will likely happen again in the future if reimbursement rates aren't brought up to the level needed in this state. The level of support the citizens of Rhode Island DESERVE.

Newport Hospital Birthing Center treats over 1200 women a year, & almost 500 infants. The seriousness of the closing of a unit like this, that is not accessible during emergencies or high traffic times, could be detrimental to the women & families we serve. Imagine having to drive over an hour on a summer day or during rush hour in advanced labor to another hospital to safely birth your baby? Even worse, imagine you are hemorrhaging, or your baby is in distress, & there is no immediate Labor & Delivery team to safely deliver your infant, & save both of your lives? These are VERY real circumstances we see often. And with the recent snowstorm, there were 22 hours when no one could drive off the island because the bridges were closed. Newport Hospital Birthing Center served 4 pregnant women during that storm. That is EIGHT lives who could have been in jeopardy had we not been available to them.

Our Birthing Center has a very high education & training level of our Practitioners & nurses. 90% of the nurses are Bachelor of Science educated. 70% are Certified Specialty Nurses. Two are MA prepared RNs & we have one DNP. We are required to be ACLS & NALS (Neonatal Advanced Life Support) certified. I don't believe people realize how many infants are born needing lifesaving intervention &/or resuscitation. We are a Magnet Designated hospital, with a national reputation for nursing excellence.

We have THE lowest Cesarean section rate of all the RI hospitals, & close to the national lowest average. We are Baby Friendly Certified which is a World Health Organization designation, promoting infant health & upholding the highest standards of infant feeding. We were one of the 1st facilities to become certified (the certification is very difficult to obtain and keep), and remain one of the minority institutions continuing the certification. We have a very robust Childbirth education & infant education curriculum. Our Breastfeeding support group is instrumental in new mom's success in breastfeeding - but it is also a lifeline for some new mothers who are struggling emotionally, physically or mentally - to know that once a week they can come back here to connect with the nurses, as well as other new mothers in the same situation. This group is free, open to all moms, whether or not they delivered with us, whether or not they are breastfeeding, and is very well attended weekly all year long. We have International Board Certified Lactation Consultants available. We also have a 24/7 Emergency Warm Line for patients with questions or concerns about their health, their pregnancy, their infant or breastfeeding issues.

The Birthing Center at Newport Hospital doesn't only deliver babies. We have numerous evaluations a week of pregnant women who are seen in the Women's clinic, but need further evaluation and monitoring as an outpatient, for Pre-term labor & interventions to stop labor, Hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, Gestational diabetes, bleeding, & numerous "false alarm labors" of women who come in thinking their membranes ruptured (water broke), decreased fetal movement, or that they may or may not be in labor. We have many outpatient procedures for pregnant mothers - testing, evaluations, diabetic teaching, for example. For infants, we do outpatient circumcisions, hearing screens, PKU testing, bilirubin testing & some re-admissions for phototherapy.

In the interest of our local population here, including many underserved communities who may not have transportation or family support, closing a unit like this would be catastrophic to the very fabric of a community that relies on a local Birthing Center. I implore you to support the resolutions that would support this mission: H8203, H7272 & H7626.

**Very Sincerely,
Rebecca Clark-Homer, RN, BSN
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