

Dear Chair and Members of the House Health Committee:

Newport Hospital must offer essential health care services to our communities and families on Aquidneck Island and the surrounding area. Brown Health must keep the Birthing Center at Newport Hospital open.

We write in strong support of H8203, H7272 and H7627. Access to local maternity care is a fundamental component of public health infrastructure. When birthing services are reduced or eliminated without meaningful transparency and review, families and communities bear the consequences. Women and children will be placed at risk for serious injury or death if access to birthing services, including this Center, continue to bear the brunt of cost saving strategies by medical institutions.

As parents who experienced exemplary care at the Birthing Center at Newport Hospital, we traveled from Warwick to Newport for all three pregnancies. There was no question about our decision to return for subsequent pregnancies after a complicated delivery and postpartum hemorrhage were handled with expertise and compassionate care during our first delivery. Our second pregnancy ended abruptly in miscarriage, for which members of the Birthing Center contacted us four times in the first 24 hours to ensure our wellbeing during an extremely difficult time. Our third and most recent pregnancy involved multiple trips to the Birthing Center to assess pregnancy-induced hypertension and ensure the health of mother and baby. Our daughter was born healthy in a well-coordinated delivery.

While Women and Infants Hospital provides excellent care for complicated deliveries, no single institution can meet all the needs of Rhode Island's birthing population. The closure of birthing centers throughout the state will place an unsustainable burden on the remaining hospital system and lead to increased adverse maternal and neonatal outcomes during a time when maternal mortality continues to rise nationwide.

Evidence from rural hospital closures demonstrates the serious consequences of reduced access to obstetric services. Research shows that loss of hospital-based obstetric services is associated with increased rates of preterm birth, births in facilities without obstetric capacity, and inadequate prenatal care. Furthermore, longer travel distances to delivery hospitals are associated with significantly increased risks of severe maternal morbidity, with one study showing a 53% higher risk for patients living 37-50 miles from a birthing hospital compared to those living within 3 miles. Recent data from South Carolina found that rural residents who bypassed local hospitals to deliver at distant urban facilities experienced the highest rates of severe maternal morbidity and mortality—even higher than those who delivered locally.

The Newport Hospital Birthing Center serves a critical role in Rhode Island's regionalized maternity care system. Its closure would force families from Aquidneck Island and surrounding communities to travel significantly farther for routine deliveries, potentially increasing complications and worsening outcomes. For our family, the Birthing Center provided not just medical expertise but continuity of care, accessibility, and the personalized attention that made all the difference during both routine and complicated pregnancies. We were treated as a family unit, receiving personalized care; the care that is needed throughout the medical system.

We urge decision-makers to consider the substantial body of evidence demonstrating that access to local, high-quality obstetric services improves maternal and neonatal outcomes. The Newport Hospital Birthing Center represents exactly the kind of facility that should be preserved and supported, not closed.

We respectfully urge passage of these bills.

Sincerely,

Mr. and Mrs. Raymond J Ho

Warwick, RI