

April 6, 2026

Statement of Support for Rhode Island H-8203, H-7272 & H-7627

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan
Chair, House Health and Human Service Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair and Members of the House Health Committee:

My name is Vivienne O'Dwyer Donohue and I am a resident of Middletown, RI. I am a mother of two sons and gave birth in October 2022 and October 2024 at Women and Infants Hospital. **I am writing to share my support for the following bills: H-8203, H-7272 and H-7627.** Access to local maternity care is vital for the health and well-being of expectant mothers, babies and families in Rhode Island.

I am a member of Moms Over Margins, an advocacy group formed in response to the possible closure of the Birthing Center at Newport Hospital. I feel passionate about advocating for the importance of a top-notch local birthing center as I have experienced first-hand what it's like when a hospital chooses profits over patient care. I don't think there is enough emphasis on the importance of showing a birthing mother unconditional love and support while she is enduring the most vulnerable experience of her life.

A rally was held last summer to call attention to the Birthing Center's possible closure and its impact on the community. With my nine-month-old son in his stroller, we walked in solidarity down Broadway with 100 other moms, some who were nine months pregnant and others who gave birth only weeks prior. We pushed our strollers, held our kids' hands and found our inner cheerleader to shout chants about the importance of the birthing center. This event was highly successful in raising awareness and Brown Health announced the Birthing Center would remain open for another year.

However, in the months following the rally, there was confusion on Aquidneck Island regarding the Birthing Center and the messaging that was sent from Brown Health. The Birthing Center was only committed to be open for the following year with a review. Many local people thought there was no need to do any further work. I am grateful to our community leaders who showed unwavering support for our expectant mothers and babies and kept pushing the issue forward.

The passing of H-8203 and H-7272 would implement transparency and accountability for Brown Health. I was happy to hear the announcement that Brown Health is prioritizing the Birthing Center, and it will remain open however the messaging once again caused confusion. It is contingent upon receiving almost \$5M in annual state and philanthropic investments but no plan was announced on how the annual funds would be raised and Brown Health's expectations of the community.

When I gave birth in 2024 it was the month before the nursing staff at Women and Infants went on strike. I had no idea I was showing up to a hospital that was incredibly short staffed and didn't have any rooms available. That scenario was never shared with me as a possibility and something to consider on my birth plan. Can you imagine driving 45 minutes in labor and showing up to a birthing hospital and almost getting turned away because they had no room for you? Can you imagine being stuck in an ER/triage area for 3.5 hours, feeling trapped and alone? Can you imagine not receiving any monitoring or encouraging words from medical staff as you lay on that gurney in labor? Thankfully my story has a happy ending and my son arrived safely in the triage area. I thought my experience was rare but have since spoken to quite a few doulas and nurses, and sadly that is not the case.

It is my hope that H-8203, H-7272 and H-7627 will be passed to ensure the Birthing Center at Newport Hospital will remain a necessary staple in our community and will continue to provide expectant mothers and babies with top notch care. Giving birth is the most vulnerable experience of one's life and expectant mothers and babies should be treated with unconditional love, care and respect. Please see beyond any balance sheets and feel the immense impact this issue has on everyone's lives.

I respectfully urge passage.

Sincerely,

Vivienne O'Dwyer Donohue