

April 9, 2026

Rhode Island House of Representatives

Re: House Bills H8203, H7272, and H7626; Senate Bill S2380

Dear Honorable Rhode Island State Representatives,

I am writing to you as a Newport resident, a patient of Newport Hospital, and someone who has spent fifteen years serving on Newport's Planning Board and Zoning Board. I bring all of these perspectives to urge your continued and vigorous support for the Noreen Stonor Drexel Birthing Center- and, equally, your scrutiny of the business practices of its operator, Brown University Health. This community facility is not only as a place of birth, but also the anchor of women's healthcare for Aquidneck Island and our neighboring towns and cities.

My connection to this birthing center is personal and enduring. Both of my children were born there more than twenty years ago, and my first was born within about 30 minutes of my arrival. The care I received was exceptional- kind, expertly skilled, and deeply attentive. In the decades since, as my healthcare needs have shifted, I continue to receive outstanding gynecological care at Newport Hospital. That continuity of care exists because the birthing center exists. And that is what is at risk alongside safe, accessible, local and reliable care for the newest members of our community...our babies.

While I feel hopeful hearing Brown University Health's recent announcement that the center will remain open, the \$4.9 million annual funding gap that's been identified makes it clear that this is not a resolved issue. In the weeks prior to their announcement, local news outlets reported that BUH's purchase of two Massachusetts hospitals operating at a loss are driving the organization's need to close important facilities in Rhode Island that are performing well. It is deeply unjust for Rhode Island patients and Rhode Island communities to lose essential services because of financial mismanagement across the state line. Mothers and their babies, and all women of all ages in Newport and across Aquidneck Island should not have to bear the consequences of business decisions that had nothing to do with them and where they had no voice.

This is why I believe the most important thing the legislature can do is hold Brown Health accountable for running its Rhode Island operations with transparency, competence, and a genuine commitment to the communities it serves- not simply find new funding for the birthing center. Before any public dollars are directed toward closing this funding gap, Rhode Islanders deserve to know: how did Brown University Health arrive here? What oversight exists to ensure that profitable Rhode Island facilities are not subsidizing failing ones

elsewhere? And what guarantees can Brown University Health offer that this conversation will not repeat itself in another year or two?

I also want to raise a area of this issue that my planning background compels me to mention. Newport is currently updating its Comprehensive Plan- the document that shapes the character and livability of our city for years to come. Accessible, high-quality healthcare is not a fringe amenity; it is infrastructure, as essential to a functioning community as any road or utility. Young families deciding whether to put down roots here, and older residents who wish to age in place, both depend on knowing that specialized medical care is available on this island.

The reason that care is available- the reason Newport Hospital has OB/GYN physicians at all- is the birthing center. Obstetrics and gynecology is a specialty that requires an active labor and delivery unit. Without it, many if not all of those physicians would have little professional basis to remain here. Without them, there are no local annual well-woman exams, gynecologic cancer screenings, menopause management, and the full range of care that women depend on long after their childbearing years are behind them. This is the perspective that can get overlooked in the current debate: women who have already had their children are not onlookers in this turning point. We are patients, and we are affected every single year.

I urge you to support Rep. Carson's proposed legislation, H8203, H7272, and H7626, and Senators Euer, DiPalma, and Ujifusa's proposed Bill S2380, all requiring rigorous review before any birthing center closure. I further ask you to demand transparency and accountability from Brown University Health about how it conducts its business across its entire system. Rhode Island deserves an operator that treats its communities as a priority, not a discretionary budget item.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MPattavina', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Melissa Pattavina

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