

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my appreciation for the recent announcement that the Newport Birthing Center will remain open. This news brings a sense of relief to many in our community who have been advocating tirelessly to preserve access to local, community-based maternity care in Newport.

At the same time, I want to be clear: while this is an important step forward, it is not the finish line. There is still significant work to be done to ensure the long-term stability, transparency, and accountability needed to truly protect this essential resource.

For this reason, I strongly support both **H8203** and **H7272**.

H8203 is a critical safeguard that ensures public dollars are aligned with public good. Conditioning the distribution of state funds to Brown University Health on the continued operation of a birthing center in Newport helps create accountability and reinforces the importance of maintaining local access to care.

H7272 is equally important, as it establishes necessary protections around transparency and public process. Requiring notice, financial disclosure, and public hearings before any closure or significant reduction in services ensures that communities are not left in the dark about decisions that directly impact their health and well-being.

As a member of the Community Advisory Panel (CAP), I also want to share some reflections from our recent engagement with Brown University Health. During our discussions, there was an understanding among myself and others that stronger, more explicit language would be included in public communications, language that clearly affirmed the birthing center would remain open indefinitely. This expectation was reinforced by statements from Brown staff indicating that the commitment would be clearly articulated.

However, the language as presented suggests that continued funding is necessary simply to sustain operations, which introduces uncertainty about the center's future. It does not read as a firm, unequivocal commitment to keeping the birthing center open regardless of funding outcomes, while simultaneously pursuing additional resources to strengthen and enhance services.

This distinction matters. Our community deserves clarity and confidence, not ambiguity, when it comes to the future of such a vital service. We understand that the current situation is informed in part by an independent assessment conducted by Kaufman Hall, which found that the Newport Birthing Center provides safe, high-quality care while also identifying challenges common to low-volume programs, such as workforce sustainability and readiness for high-acuity, low-frequency events. While this context is important, it also reinforces the need for thoughtful, proactive investment and planning, not uncertainty.

Although we are encouraged by the commitment to keep the birthing center open, many CAP members left recent conversations still feeling uncertain and with outstanding questions, particularly regarding the financial assumptions and long-term sustainability planning. We look forward to upcoming meetings to better understand these details and to continue engaging in good faith.

In closing, I urge you to pass H8203 and H7272 as necessary steps toward ensuring that the Newport Birthing Center is not only preserved in the short term, but protected and strengthened for the future. Our community deserves nothing less than a clear, transparent, and enduring commitment to accessible, high-quality maternity care.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Sydney Ormerod