



To: House Committee on Health and Human Services
From: Brown University Health
Date: April 9, 2026
Subject: Testimony for H 8203

Dear Chairwoman Donovan and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on H 8203. My name is Tenny Thomas, MD, FACEP, MHL and have served as President & CMO of Newport Hospital since June 2025.

Newport Hospital is part of [Brown University Health](#), Rhode Island's largest health system and its largest employer, serving patients across a comprehensive and integrated network of care. As a system, we have more than 1,620 patient care offices and locations, including our four hospitals in Rhode Island and two in Southeastern Massachusetts. We are committed to delivering high-quality, patient-centered care in every community we serve. As a leading academic and clinical health system, we attract world-class physicians, researchers, and healthcare professionals, fostering innovation, advancing medical education, and ensuring access to cutting-edge treatments. Our health system plays a critical role in strengthening the region's healthcare infrastructure, driving economic growth, and improving the overall health and well-being of the populations we serve.

We appreciate the legislature's focus on ensuring continued access to maternal care and share the same goal of supporting strong, sustainable services for our communities. Following a thorough review, including an independent assessment by Kaufman Hall and meaningful community engagement through our Community Advisory Panel (CAP), **Brown University Health announced on April 3 that we will keep the Noreen Stonor Drexel Birthing Center open.** The assessment confirmed that the center delivers safe, quality care with strong clinical support, including 24/7 obstetric, pediatric, and anesthesia coverage, while also identifying areas that require additional investment to ensure long-term sustainability.

Importantly, maintaining this service will require new, sustained annual funding through a combination of increased state support and philanthropic investment. As a low-volume birthing center operating in a high-risk clinical environment, it faces ongoing challenges related to workforce sustainability, maintaining readiness for high-acuity but infrequent events, and ensuring operational reliability.

At the same time, proposals like H 8203 to restrict funding to health systems if a birthing center closes may unintentionally make it more difficult to preserve access to care, not simply for the birthing center but it will impact care across the system.



Decisions about maintaining services like this are never taken lightly and are driven in large part by structural realities, including reimbursement rates that do not keep pace with the true cost of care. Lower patient volume services, combined with reimbursement challenges, make it difficult to recruit and retain clinicians, particularly when neighboring states like Massachusetts can offer more competitive compensation and higher-volume practice settings. Clinicians are understandably drawn to environments where they can maintain and strengthen their skills, and the current number of births does not always align with those professional needs. Reducing funding in response to these pressures risks further straining the system and limiting our ability to invest in patient care. We remain committed to community engagement, and we are grateful for the support and partnership of local stakeholders, including Aquidneck Island and surrounding communities' legislators and council members, and our CAP, which provide guidance and advocacy in this process.

To help address these broader challenges, we have also launched a Medicaid advocacy effort focused on aligning reimbursement with the true cost of care. Medicaid reimbursement in Rhode Island continues to lag behind neighboring states like Massachusetts¹, creating additional strain on providers and limiting our ability to sustain critical services. This gap affects not only birthing centers, but the overall strength and accessibility of our healthcare system.

We believe there is a meaningful opportunity to work collaboratively with policymakers to address these underlying issues through more sustainable funding solutions. Strengthening reimbursement and supporting long-term investment in care delivery will be essential to preserving access, supporting our workforce, and ensuring high-quality care for patients across our region.

Thank you,


Tenny Thomas (Apr 7, 2026 18:18:53 EDT)

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¹<https://rhodeislandcurrent.com/2025/02/17/a-hip-replacement-in-massachusetts-is-no-different-from-one-in-rhode-island-paying-for-it-is/#:~:text=February%2017%2C%202025%205:45,cannot%20be%20ignored%20any%20longer.>