



State of Rhode Island

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Committee on Oversight

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Committee on Small Business

Committee on Municipal Government and Housing

July 21, 2025

Dear Ms. Frost and Dr. Thomas:

It has come to our attention that Brown Health is considering closing the Birthing Center at Newport Hospital in your next fiscal budget, due in October 2025.

We strongly oppose such a closure. The importance of an on-island location for having babies and receiving prenatal and postnatal care cannot be overstated.

The Noreen Stonor Drexel Birthing Center at Newport Hospital carries the prestigious [Baby-Friendly designation](#) from the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Newport Hospital is recognized for providing an optimal environment for the promotion, protection, and support of obstetric care. Hospitals are awarded this status only when trained, independent evaluators have determined that all hospital practices meet the rigorous Baby-Friendly standards.

But there are other reasons for us to oppose this decision.

Together, we represent tens of thousands of constituents across Newport County, many of whom are deeply concerned about the potential impact of such a decision. Newport Hospital serves as a cornerstone for healthcare services for all of Aquidneck Island and Newport County, including the hundreds of Navy families who make their homes here while serving our country. The Birthing Center is staffed by dedicated healthcare professionals who provide high-quality, compassionate care to the hundreds of families in Newport County. Access to local obstetric and maternal healthcare is critical for ensuring safe pregnancies and reducing maternal and pediatric health risks. Traveling off the Island for obstetric health care is unacceptable.

The unacceptable impact on families, especially newborns and women, is the greatest risk. The potential stress on our municipal services will also be significant if the Center is closed.

The Rhode Island legislature took steps in the 2026 budget, which we passed last month, to address the financial crisis facing the Rhode Island healthcare system. For example, our 2026 state budget bolsters primary care by allocating more than \$40 million — \$15 million in in-state funding, with the remainder from federal sources — toward Medicaid rate increases for primary care providers. The budget stipulates that a primary care rate review be completed by September 1, 2026. The General Assembly created a three-year pilot program prohibiting insurers from requiring prior authorization for medically necessary health care services ordered

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by patients' primary care providers. The state budget added \$38 million over the governor's proposal for hospital reimbursement rates and direct support payments. We are clearly hearing your concerns and working to address them.

Now we are asking you to hear us: we are urging you to maintain the full operation of the Birthing Center. We are also requesting a public meeting on Aquidneck Island in August with you, so that you can hear firsthand the concerns of our constituents, which will demonstrate to you the seriousness of this decision to Newport County residents.

Please keep us informed as you review your decision-making. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Lauren H. Carson
Representative, District 75
Newport



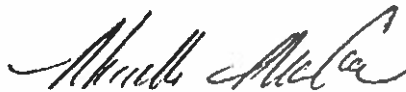
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District 72
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Representative
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Portsmouth, Tiverton, Little Compton

CC:

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House Speaker Joseph Shekarchi
Director of the RIDOH (add the name)
Town Council of Middletown

Town Council of Jamestown
Town Council of Portsmouth
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