

Testimony for HHC Hearing on HB 2845

3 minutes max

Chair Salinas, co-chair Hayden, members of the committee. My name is Devin Salazar and I am a Certified Nurse Midwife practicing in the Willamette Valley. I have a 13-year-old stepson and a 20-month-old daughter. When I became pregnant with in 2016, I knew I didn't want to birth in a hospital. As a nurse midwife, I deliver babies within a hospital setting and while I believe that my colleagues and I provide great care to women and families, I wanted care that was more personal, simpler, and without the fear of unnecessary medical interventions. After much consideration, my husband and I opted to deliver at a free-standing birth center in Aurora, Oregon owned by a nurse midwife.

Through my job, I have good medical insurance that covered most of my maternity care, including lab work, ultrasounds and 80% of the facility fee. Partway through my pregnancy, however, I learned that my insurance would not cover the birth center's facility fee because it was not part of an in-network hospital. If I transferred care to deliver at an in-network hospital, the facility fee would be covered. If not, we would have to pay \$6,800 out of pocket. I appealed my insurance's decision to not cover the facility fee and my appeal was denied.

My husband and I were faced with a big dilemma: do we make the financially responsible decision and birth at an in-network hospital or do we use a big portion of our savings to pay the facility fee for the birth center? We decided that having the birth that we wanted at the location we desired was worth the cost. Our financial privilege allowed us to make that choice; most women and families in this state do not have that same financial freedom.

In my work as a midwife, I have cared for multiple women who intended to give birth at the same birth center I did, but who couldn't afford the facility fee and ultimately transferred care to my group of midwives to deliver at the hospital. I hope that our midwives did the best we could to give them the birth they desired, but I still recognize that this wasn't their original plan and that the most common barrier was the facility fee.

My husband and I want to expand our family sometime soon, but we are in a different place financially than before my daughter was born: my husband is a full-time student at PSU, we have childcare expenses now and a mortgage payment. We can't afford the out of pocket cost to cover the birth center's facility fee this time around, at least not without using most of our savings. So we are faced with the decision again to make the financially "smart" choice and birth at a hospital or assume the financial burden of the birth center's facility fee.

At a time when we are working to improve the safety and quality of healthcare in Oregon without driving up costs, requiring insurers to cover the facility fee for freestanding birth centers would help meet that goal. You can help positively impact the health of many growing families across Oregon when you vote on this bill. Thank you for considering my testimony.