

Feb. 24, 2021

Dear Oregon State House Committee on Health Care,

Families in our state deserve access to midwifery and birth center care. The model of care provided by the health care professional affected by this bill contributes to the overall well being of babies, women, and families. The Health Care Committee can assure that midwifery can thrive—and its many benefits be available to Oregon families—with the passage of HB2388.

I am an executive board member of Lane County Friends of the Birth Center. We are a volunteer-led organization that advocates for access to midwifery and birth center care in Lane County. I gave birth to my two daughters into the hands of midwives at the PeaceHealth Nurse-Midwifery Birth Center. I live in Eugene. Our family experienced the full benefits of midwifery care: personal, interactive prenatal visits with a provider; access to lactation support; a robust community clinic in which mothers gathered for support; access to nurses who monitored my babies' health and growth. We made the decision to start a family, nurtured our children in the womb, delivered them without interventions in a location of our choice, and undertook the hard work of parenting—all with the support of committed midwives and staff who knew us well. This model of care was a gift to our family. Midwifery makes a difference in individual lives, but it is also statistically significant in lowering medical costs and improving outcomes!

Unfortunately for citizens of Lane County, PeaceHealth decided suddenly—and without input from our community—to close the Nurse-Midwifery Birth Center in May 2019. Despite the birth center being home to a thriving community health clinic, PeaceHealth decided that the birth center was not profitable enough to continue to support it. In short, despite the very effective model of care being provided to families all over Lane County—birth center care provided by midwives with admitting privileges to the hospital and partnerships with OBGYNs there—PeaceHealth decided to put its money and support elsewhere.

When the closure was announced, hundreds of families, including former clients and currently pregnant mothers who would lose their providers before their due dates, gathered in protest. We lobbied the hospital to keep our birth center open. Our community understands the benefits of midwifery and birth center care, and we advocated strongly in favor of it. PeaceHealth ignored our concerns, however, and closed the birth center, which made the fully integrated, human-centered model of care I described above unavailable to people in our county. Furthermore, Lane County recently closed its Community Health Clinic's prenatal clinic, which employed midwives as care providers. Currently, beyond home birth, there is no out-of-hospital option for birthing families in our area.

But the Committee on Health Care can ensure that Oregon families have access to this exemplary model of care! If midwives were reimbursed by insurance companies at a level commensurate to other providers, then a birth center could become a sustainable business practice. Passing this bill would ensure that midwifery could become a robust model of care in our state, thus ensuring access to a model of care that is proven to increase positive outcomes to mothers and babies.

Citizens of Lane County lost a valuable health care asset in our community because of financial decisions made by a hospital. The House Committee on Health Care has it in its power to ensure that this won't happen again: midwives should be compensated for their work at the level of other providers. A vote in favor of HB2388 is a vote in favor of giving Oregonians a choice in medical care,

and a vote in support of families in our state who deserve the safe, personalized care that midwives provide.

Sincerely,

Jenny Noyce
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