



March of Dimes
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Contact: Chloe Schwartz, Massachusetts Director of Maternal & Infant Health,
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**MARCH OF DIMES STRONGLY OPPOSES PROPOSED CLOSURE
OF BIRTHING CENTER AT LEOMINSTER HOSPITAL**

Boston, MA – In response to the growing crisis of maternity care deserts across the United States, March of Dimes is formally announcing their strong opposition to the proposed closure of the Birthing Center at Leominster Hospital.

In joining this statewide effort, we have drafted the below letter calling on Governor Healey, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and UMass Memorial Health CEO Eric Dickson to listen to their community and take all necessary steps to keep this essential service available at Leominster Hospital.

The full text of our letter is provided below:

On behalf of March of Dimes, we are writing to appeal to the Healey administration, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and UMass Memorial Health to take the necessary steps to rescind the proposed closure of the Birthing Center at UMass Memorial-Health Alliance-Clinton Hospital's Leominster campus in order to ensure all mothers and birthing persons in the Commonwealth have adequate, high-quality access to maternity care.

This is just the latest in a series of closures for our state's healthcare system, and we are moving into dangerous territory. 5.6 million women and birthing persons in the United States already live in areas with low or no access to maternity care. We do not want to see Massachusetts turn into the home of maternity care deserts, but based on what we have seen in the last few years, that now seems inevitable.

Our latest [report](#) on maternity care deserts, released August 1, 2023, used data available up until 2020 to examine access to maternity care services in all 50 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico. In that report, we found that nearly 5% of women and birthing persons in Massachusetts already did not have a birthing hospital within 30 minutes driving distance (based on normal traffic patterns). We also found that the five most western and central Massachusetts counties, in addition to others, had a high chronic health burden (the percent of birthing persons with 1+ chronic health conditions), which increases the likelihood of having a preterm birth by 47%.



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What this report does not take into account are the closures that have taken place since 2020, both foreseen and unforeseen. The North Shore Birth Center was closed by Beth Israel Lahey Health at the end of 2022. Norwood Hospital, which has been closed due to severe flooding since 2020, has announced it will not be re-opening its maternity ward. Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital suffered from an electrical fire in early 2023 and will remain closed into 2024, at the least.

The 2022 March of Dimes [report card](#), an annual report presenting the state of maternal and infant health in the U.S., showed the state's preterm birth rate at 9%, the highest rate reported since 2011, with Black families in Massachusetts experiencing preterm birth at a 25% greater rate than all other women at 10.9%, higher than the national average. Worcester County's preterm birth rate worsened year-over-year to its current rate of 9.4%, accounting for more than 800 preterm births. A new [report](#) released in July 2023 from the Department of Public Health found that severe maternal morbidity doubled in Massachusetts from 2011 to 2020.

The intention of these reports is to demonstrate a dangerous trend of decreasing availability of maternity service providers that is occurring alongside a rise in preterm birth, infant mortality, maternal mortality and maternal morbidity in the United States, particularly for communities of color. Massachusetts is no exception to these trends. We strongly oppose the closure of this unit for the Fitchburg and Leominster families it serves, and for the impact that it will have on the entirety of Worcester County. We urge the Department of Public Health and Governor Healey's administration to take whatever steps are needed to intervene to protect the public health of these communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chloe Schwartz'.

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