



Service Employees International Union – Oregon State Council

6401 SE Foster ▪ Portland, OR 97206

March 21, 2023

Re: Support for HB 3592

Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, members of the House Committee on Rules,

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) is in support of HB3592, as a means to safeguard the health of Oregonians. SEIU is an organization of 85,000 working Oregonians who are members of our Union. Our mission is to achieve a higher standard of living for our members, their families, and dependents by elevating their social conditions and by striving to create a more just society.

Earlier this year, we were deeply troubled to read the announcement that Legacy was planning to close Mt. Hood Medical Center's Family Birth Center. However, we were not surprised. Closures of maternity units have become more and more common across the nation in recent years, particularly at facilities in rural areas or those that disproportionately low-income or non-white patients.¹

The proposed closure in Gresham mirrors these national trends. The Center serves a diverse patient population in East Multnomah county, many of whom are low-income, immigrants and people of color. They are also more likely to be insured through public sources like the Oregon Health Plan. The closure of the Family Birthing Center would require laboring patients to travel between 20 and 40 minutes to other facilities to give birth or be transported via East County's already overburdened EMS system.²

We support the passage of HB3592 because we firmly believe safeguards must be put in place to ensure that all people in Oregon maintain equal access to essential healthcare services – and because Legacy is unlikely to be the last health system in our state to propose shuttering a labor and delivery unit.

In fact, in neighboring Northern California, our state's largest healthcare system, Providence, is attempting to close down the maternity unit at Petaluma Valley Hospital. When Providence asked taxpayers to approve their purchase of this public health district hospital in 2021, they promised to keep the unit open for a minimum of five years, but they are now already planning to close it.³

A closer examination reveals that the two closures have a significant amount in common. In both cases, the health systems claim that staff shortages have made operating the units untenable. However, evidence points to their unwillingness to pay competitive wages or provide the kind of safe staffing that would retain capable workers.⁴ Also, both units are located in low-income areas where most patients are publicly insured and, as such, are financial losers for their nonprofit operators.

¹ [Why the problem of maternity care deserts is getting worse | PBS News Weekend](#)

² [Board of Health Legacy Birthing Center Statement 20230217 \(multco-web7-psh-files-usw2.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](#)

³ [Community Matters: Hospital turmoil a national problem \(petaluma360.com\)](#)

⁴ [Community Matters: Hospital turmoil a national problem \(petaluma360.com\)](#); [East County lawmakers urge state to block Legacy's closure of Gresham birth center | The Lund Report](#)



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If our state is serious about eliminating health inequities by 2030, we need to put standards in place now to ensure we don't move further from our goal. Changes to the provision of essential health services in our state need to be made with patients – not profits – at the center.