

Submitter: Lily Wittich
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB693

Chair Reynolds and Members of the Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of SB 693 to create a taskforce on the perinatal workforce in Oregon.

My name is Lily Wittich, and I am a family medicine physician in Baker City, Oregon. I am writing to ask you to vote yes on SB 693 to create a taskforce to improve the perinatal workforce in Oregon.

When I first started practice in Baker City, I was providing the full-spectrum family medicine care that I had been trained to do in residency. I saw patients in clinic, I took care of hospitalized patients, and I delivered babies both vaginally and by Cesarean. I have three other partners who did the same and I am extremely proud of the high quality care we delivered with our obstetrical and surgical team in our rural and geographically remote area. The model of family practice doctors providing obstetrical care, especially in rural areas, has a long track record of excellent care at lower cost to healthcare systems as well as improved access to care. Having the same provider caring for mother and baby improves continuity of care and patient safety.

In June of 2023, the hospital in Baker City, part of a larger health system, made the decision to close the birthing unit. This administrative decision effectively deprived 100+ families in our county of a safe birthing option within 45 miles. The decision was made as a culmination of many complicated factors, but primarily it was due to staffing shortages, specifically a lack of obstetrically trained labor and delivery nurses. The closure occurred in August of 2023.

Workforce issues are a large driving force in the threat of closure in small and rural hospital labor wards. A taskforce at the state level would be an excellent start to help address the perinatal workforce shortages at all levels – nurses, family practice providers, and certified nurse midwives. Improving workforce challenges will lead to improved maternal and neonatal outcomes throughout our state, but especially in rural underserved areas like Baker City.

Please vote yes on SB 693, and thank you for the work you are doing to protect the health and safety of Oregon mothers and babies.

Lily J. Wittich, MD