

2026 -- H 8490

LC006365

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- THE NOREEN DREXEL BIRTHING CENTER
FUND

Introduced By: Representatives Carson, Cortvriend, Edwards, and McGaw

Date Introduced: April 29, 2026

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The general assembly finds and declares that:

2 (1) Access to high-quality maternal and infant health care services is essential to the health
3 and well-being of families in Newport County and across Rhode Island.

4 (2) The Newport Hospital birthing center provides critical, community-based maternity
5 care, reducing the need for patients to travel off-island for services.

6 (3) The preservation and long-term sustainability of birthing services require coordinated
7 public, private, and philanthropic investment.

8 (4) It is in the public interest to establish a dedicated fund to support the continued operation
9 and improvement of the birthing center.

10 (5) The birthing center is an owned entity of Lifespan Physician Group, Inc., operating as
11 Brown University Health, but it is also a community resource and should be treated that way.

12 Therefore, the purpose of this act is to establish the Noreen Drexel Birthing Center Fund
13 to provide immediate and sustainable financial support for the operation of the birthing center.

14 SECTION 2. Title 23 of the General Laws entitled "HEALTH AND SAFETY" is hereby
15 amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

16 [CHAPTER 13.9](#)

17 [THE NOREEN DREXEL BIRTHING CENTER FUND](#)

18 **23-13.9-1. Title.**

1 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the “Noreen Drexel Birthing Center Fund
2 Act.”

3 **23-13.9-2. Establishment of the fund.**

4 (a) There is hereby established within the department of health a restricted receipt account
5 to be known as the “Noreen Drexel Birthing Center Fund,” hereinafter referred to as the “fund.”

6 (b) The fund shall be administered by the department of health in collaboration with the
7 Newport Hospital Foundation.

8 (c) Monies in the fund shall be used exclusively to support the continued operation,
9 staffing, and enhancement of birthing services at Newport Hospital or any successor entity
10 providing equivalent services in Newport County.

11 **23-13.9-3. Funding.**

12 (a) For fiscal year 2027, the total appropriation from the state to the fund shall be one
13 million six hundred thirty-three thousand three hundred thirty-three dollars (\$1,633,333), which
14 appropriation shall be conditional upon the following.

15 (1) A deposit of one million six hundred thirty-three thousand three hundred thirty-three
16 dollars (\$1,633,333), derived from Brown Health or its successor entity is provided to the fund;
17 and

18 (2) Deposit(s) totaling one million six hundred thirty-three thousand three hundred thirty-
19 three dollars (\$1,633,333), derived from philanthropic contributions including, but not limited to,
20 donations from individuals, foundations, and community organizations is provided to the fund.

21 (b) The Newport Hospital Foundation is authorized to deposit philanthropic contributions
22 into the fund and under the authorization of the department of health may receive funding to
23 effectuate the purpose of § 23-13.9-2(c).

24 **23-13.9-4. Conditions and accountability.**

25 (a) Brown Health or its operating entity shall be eligible for funds pursuant to this chapter
26 provided they maintain:

27 (1) Birthing services at Newport Hospital for the duration of the funding period;

28 (2) Continuous, year-round operation of inpatient labor and delivery services at Newport
29 Hospital, without seasonal, or unreasonable intermittent, or temporary suspension;

30 (3) Twenty-four (24) hour, seven (7)-day-per-week availability of hospital-based obstetric
31 services, including on-site or immediately available obstetric physicians;

32 (4) Certified nurse staffing levels sufficient to support safe and timely deliveries including
33 emergency obstetric care without diversion, routine transfer, or redirection of patients to other
34 facilities due to staffing limitations;

- 1 (5) No reduction in the scope of services offered at the birthing center including, but not
2 limited to:
- 3 (i) Elimination of inpatient labor and delivery;
4 (ii) Conversion to outpatient-only, triage-only, or stabilization-only services;
5 (iii) Routine diversion of laboring patients to other hospitals; or
6 (iv) Restrictions that effectively require planned deliveries to occur off-island; and
7 (6) No administrative, financial, or operational action that renders the birthing center
8 incapable of serving the healthcare needs of women and infants in Newport County.
- 9 (b) Brown Health or its operating entity, for eligibility for funding under this chapter shall:
- 10 (1) Provide quarterly financial reports detailing revenues, expenses, and use of fund
11 resources to the director of the department of health and the Newport Hospital Foundation Board;
12 (2) Provide a final annual report on the use and impact of the fund to the director of the
13 department of health, the Newport Hospital Foundation Board, the general assembly, and any
14 philanthropic organizations that supported the fund;
- 15 (3) Conduct an annual open meeting for transparency and oversight detailing the status of
16 the birthing center;
- 17 (4) Participate in any community councils created in collaboration with local city and town
18 councils, state legislators, the Newport Hospital Foundation, and representatives of community-
19 based organizations; and
- 20 (5) Develop and submit, with community input, a sustainability plan for the birthing center
21 within twelve (12) months of receipt of funds to build a state-of-the-art women’s and maternal
22 healthcare facility.
- 23 (c) The council established pursuant to subsection (b)(4) of this section shall:
- 24 (1) Once established, meet at least quarterly to review the findings on outcomes, quality,
25 safety and financial data of the birthing center, and plan for the future of the Noreen Drexel birthing
26 center at Newport Hospital; and
- 27 (2) Ensure decisions pertaining to the fund are broadly supported, collaborative, and
28 positions the community both for input and to help with any required fundraising or advocacy to
29 insure the sustainability of the birthing center.

30 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- THE NOREEN DREXEL BIRTHING CENTER
FUND

- 1 This act would establish a fund within the department of health to support the operation
- 2 and expansion of women's, maternal, and infant health and birthing services at Newport Hospital.
- 3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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