



THE KENTUCKY ASSOCIATION OF NURSE PRACTITIONERS
AND NURSE-MIDWIVES

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March 4, 2024

Honorable Members of the Kentucky General Assembly
702 Capitol Avenue
Capitol Annex
Frankfort, KY 40601

RE: HB 199 and SB 103 Freestanding Birthing Centers

Dear Senators and Representatives,

On behalf of the membership of the Kentucky Association of Nurse Practitioners and Nurse-Midwives (KANPNM), we are pleased to express to you our ongoing and strong support for legislation which will make freestanding birthing centers a reality in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

We are grateful to the primary sponsors of both birthing center bills this session - Senator Shelley Funke Frommeyer, sponsor of SB 103, and Representative Jason Nemes, sponsor of HB 199. Both bills have a list of bipartisan co-sponsors. As you may recall, Senator Schickel, a primary cosponsor of SB 103, held a hearing on the birthing center issue before the IJC on Licensing, Occupations and Administrative Regulations on October 16, 2023.

By way of background, KANPNM represents Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs) who are one of the categories of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) that are recognized as licensed independent providers in Kentucky. CNMs provide exceptional care across the life span for women.

As advanced practice registered nurses, CNMs are trained in both nursing and midwifery. A master's degree is the minimum requirement for entry into the profession. An increasing number of CNMs pursue additional education to obtain the doctoral degree. CNMs are required to pass a national certification exam before they can be licensed as CNMs; they are also required to complete continuing education hours to maintain their national certification.

CNMs attend births, provide annual exams, reproductive screening education and health exams and treatment of minor health issues though out the life span. CNMs are the primary providers of health care for women in a midwifery and wellness model. In forty-three (43) other states, CNM practice settings include hospitals, birthing centers, and community clinics.

However, Kentucky has no freestanding birthing centers, thus closing out these practice setting opportunities for our CNMs and reducing choices for women giving birth. Birthing centers provide exceptional care to women and their newborn infants.

These centers have a decreased rate of C-sections in relation to hospital births and therefore have fewer health complications and lower costs.

The philosophy of birthing centers is providing family-centered care, in which mothers and other family members can interact during the labor process. A higher rate of breastfeeding occurs in mothers who give birth in birthing centers than those in a hospital and there are more opportunities for skin-to-skin bonding between mother and infant.

Birthing center health outcomes are better than those in the hospital for low-risk mothers (ACOG, 2015).

Kentucky is regarded nationally as the birthplace of midwifery, thanks to Mary Breckinridge who traveled Appalachia delivering babies nearly 100 years ago. She established the Frontier Nursing Service in 1925 and her midwifery tradition is carried on now by Frontier Nursing University, which educates a significant number of nurse-midwives nationally and internationally.

Unfortunately, the number of Certified Nurse-Midwives practicing in Kentucky has been stagnant over the past six years. Many CNMs leave Kentucky to practice in other states where they have the opportunity to practice in freestanding birthing centers. HB 199 and SB 103 would help create significantly more opportunities to decrease this "brain drain" from Kentucky.

Kentucky's pregnant women deserve to have access to the full range of delivery opportunities which are afforded to women in most other states. Many women anticipating an uncomplicated pregnancy do not want to deliver their baby in a hospital setting, but would prefer a birthing center or home birth. Besides giving women more options, births at birthing centers are significantly less costly than those in a hospital setting.

With approximately 50% of the births in Kentucky from mothers who are covered by Medicaid, the availability of freestanding birth centers could have financial benefits to the state, while affording more choices for safe, high-quality births.

We strongly believe that CNMs are prepared to address the healthcare needs of the women of Kentucky and the healthcare provider shortages by providing superior care to women under the midwifery model of care. By easing the red tape and making it potentially less costly to open a freestanding birthing center in Kentucky, the General Assembly will be taking a significant step toward keeping more CNMs practicing in Kentucky, while affording pregnant women more choice of birthing care and setting.

Thank you for your consideration on this important issue. We are happy to provide further information, should you have any questions, and we ask for your support of HB 199 when it is heard in the House Licensing, Occupations and Administrative Regulations Committee in the very near future.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Partin, DNP, APRN, FAANP
President



Jill York
Executive Director