



March 6, 2023

Dear Members of the Kentucky General Assembly,

The undersigned organizations are writing to express our **support for HB129 and SB67**, an act relating to freestanding birthing centers (FSBCs).

FSBCs would offer Kentuckians anticipating healthy, low-risk pregnancies an additional high-quality option within our existing maternity care landscape. These centers, staffed by licensed, qualified providers, “offer comprehensive prenatal and postpartum care in a wellness and midwifery model while providing a home-like setting in which to birth. Birth centers are an integrated part of the health care system and are guided by principles of prevention, sensitivity, safety, appropriate medical intervention and cost-effectiveness. While the practice of midwifery and the support of physiologic birth and newborn transition may occur in other settings, this is the exclusive model of care in a birth center.”¹

HB129 and SB67 would require FSBCs in Kentucky to be accredited by the Commission for the Accreditation of Birth Centers (CABC). The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recognizes CABC-accredited birth centers “as an integral part of regionalized care.”² **With 58 Kentucky counties having no access to maternity care hospitals or obstetric providers, and three more having low access,³ the citizens of the Commonwealth need more care options accessible to them.** The

Kentucky Department for Medicaid Services has existing regulations for the reimbursement of CABG-accredited FSBCs, yet our state has none of these facilities.

FSBCs are small businesses, and HB129 and SB67 will decrease barriers for their establishment in the Commonwealth. Currently, Kentuckians are traveling outside our borders to access birth center care in neighboring states. We are one of only eight states without freestanding birth centers.

FSBCs present an opportunity for cost savings while improving health outcomes. Through the *Strong Start for Mothers and Newborns* initiative, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) compared those receiving care at participating FSBCs to others enrolled in Medicaid with comparable demographic and medical characteristics living in the same counties. Regardless of where they ultimately gave birth (birth center or hospital), **birth center participants had costs that were \$2,010 lower on average from birth through the first year for each mother-infant dyad.** Birth center participants had preterm birth rates that were 25% lower than those of comparators, along with better outcomes in multiple other measures.⁴ Strong Start demonstrated reduced disparities in preterm and low birthweight birth, cesareans, and rates of breastfeeding among racial and ethnic groups in birth center care.⁵

The midwifery model of care, practiced in the birth center setting, provides increased touchpoints for parents experiencing mental health challenges in pregnancy and/or the postpartum timeframe through longer prenatal visits, individualized care, and education. “This time intensive and relationship-based midwifery care model is proposed as a key mechanism for improved outcomes” in FSBCs.

Please support Kentucky families in having access to all birth options with passage of HB129 and SB67. Thank you for your service to families in Kentucky.

Sincerely,

Kentucky Birth Coalition
Kentucky Mental Health Coalition
Kentucky Voices for Health
Kentucky Youth Advocates
Mama to Mama
Mental Health America of Kentucky
Metro United Way
Play Cousins Collective
Ready for K Alliance
ACLU of Kentucky
American Association of Birth Centers

Louisville Urban League
Black Birth Justice
Frontier Nursing University
Granny’s Birth Initiative, INC
Hope’s Embrace
Kentucky Affiliate of the American College of Nurse-Midwives
Kentucky Association of Nurse Practitioners and Nurse-Midwives
Kentucky Chapter of the National Association of Certified Professional Midwives

¹ American Association of Birth Centers. What is a Birth Center? <https://www.birthcenters.org/what-is-a-bc>

² American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Levels of Maternal Care. Obstetric Care Consensus No. 9. American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology. 2019;134:e41–55.

³ March of Dimes. Maternity Care Deserts Report. 2022. <https://www.marchofdimes.org/research/maternity-care-deserts-report.aspx>

⁴ Hoehler, A, Mayhew, M. Strong Start for Mothers and Newborns initiative (Strong Start). Joint Informational Bulletin. Department for Health and Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tbwenOdEXl0QbyS00R61gqJYAQqnTGPT/view>

⁵ Alliman, Jill et al. “Freestanding Birth Centers: An Evidence-Based Option for Birth.” The Journal of perinatal education vol. 31,1 (2022): 8-13. doi:10.1891/JPE-2021-0024