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HEALTH FACILITIES &
SERVICES REVIEW BOARD

Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board
525 West Jefferson Street, 2nd Floor
Springfield, Illinois 62761
#15-006 Bloomington-Normal Birthing Center.

I am an Ob/Gyn physician and I have been working in the obstetrical field for over 15 years. I currently work for Erie Family Health Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in Chicago, IL. I am writing in support of the Bloomington - Normal Birthing Center (#15-006). I had the opportunity to meet with the team in Bloomington working to open the Birth Center. I was inspired and impressed with their determination, commitment and diligence in planning a birthing center for their community. Many community members were present at a luncheon I attended and were supportive and hopeful that this will be a future option for pregnant women in Bloomington-Normal.

I have spent the last several years working with my community and clinic to bring greater awareness as to the current state of obstetrics. I also have extensively researched midwifery and birth center care models. The data clearly shows the benefits and advantages to this type of care for low risk pregnant women.

The full cost of a delivery at a birth center is on average one-third the full cost of a delivery in a hospital. This cost advantage does not take into account the low cesarean section rate of women who deliver in birth centers which would also greatly decrease the overall health care cost. Deliveries in birth centers have been shown to be as safe as deliveries in a hospital. Satisfaction rates among patients who deliver in a birth center is above 95%.

Over the years, the cesarean section rate has risen to the present day rate of 32.8%. Breastfeeding rates have remained low; in IL 1/3 of women are exclusively breastfeeding at 3 months. The cost of health care continues to be high at roughly 18% of spending in the U.S. which is much higher than most other developed countries; intervention has become more the norm than the exception.

In an era where we continue to advance technologically we need to more thoughtfully reflect on balancing the advancing technology and the innate abilities of humans to also heal on their own. Hospitals provide wonderful care to sick people but should be a place for ill people not well people. In my field we need to reflect on why cesarean section rates have become so high. We need to find ways to lower the rates which will subsequently lower costs, lower adverse

outcomes seen with surgery and improve patient satisfaction. We also need to increase breastfeeding rates. Almost all women are able to breastfeed but they need support and education to do it successfully. A significant focus of the birth center model is to increase breastfeeding rates by providing greater education and support to pregnant women and new mothers.

Change is needed in healthcare and people are eager for this change. Birth centers are needed now and with the availability of birth center care for more women we will start to see needed changes in the landscape of obstetrics, moving towards a more balanced approach to pregnancy and birth. The team opening the Bloomington - Normal Birthing Center has a reputation of excellent care and this will continue at the birth center. The proposed birth center for Bloomington – Normal will not only bring a new attractive option for birth to women in that community, but also help to move the State of Illinois forward in developing the birth center model of care as a viable option for our State. The ultimate goal for proponents of birth centers is to grow them into an integral part of the health care system, and to have birth centers become the preferred choice for low risk deliveries. Hospitals should focus on what they do best - providing comprehensive medical care for high risk pregnant women. This is the intended model of the Bloomington - Normal group. The growth of birth centers will ultimately provide more access to health care for women and help our society achieve universal high quality, cost-effective health care for all.

Sincerely,

Andrea Lee MD, FACOG