

Vigil Held to Protest Closure of Gresham Birth Center



Local nurses, elected leaders, patients and families led a rally to Save Family Birth Center at Legacy Mt. Hood Medical (Photo Courtesy of Oregon Nurses Association)

Staff and community members fight to stop closure

Registered nurses, elected officials and local families held a candlelight vigil on March 17 to call on Legacy Health executives to reverse course and save the Family Birth Center at Legacy Mount Hood Medical Center. Despite near-universal opposition from frontline health care workers, local families, elected officials, and community advocates—and without approval from the Oregon Health Authority—Legacy executives have said as of Friday, March 17, they plan to stop accepting patients to the family birth center.

The Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) issued the following statement upon receiving confirmation that the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) has not

approved Legacy Health's controversial plan to close the Family Birth Center:

Legacy has been given a gift. It has another chance to do the right thing. Nurses, families, and community leaders from all walks of life have been crying out for Legacy to reverse its hasty decision and work with us to save the family birth center. OHA's announcement buys Legacy more time to listen to its community and protect health care access for thousands of families in East Multnomah and Clackamas Counties.

The family birth center is Oregonians' only hospital birthplace option in Gresham—Oregon's 4th largest city—and the closest option for thousands of underserved families in East Multnomah and Clackamas Counties. Doctors and nurses there deliver and care for more than 750 babies and families a year, providing emergency and non-emergency OB-GYN services and triage for more acute OB-GYN patients than any other Legacy hospital.

Originally founded in part with community funds, the birth center serves nearly 275,000 people in East Multnomah and Clackamas Counties including his-

torically underserved neighborhoods with some of the highest concentrations of poverty in Oregon. "At a time when women's health is already under attack, it is irresponsible for Legacy to close the door on these women," said Ginny Moyer, a labor & delivery nurse at Legacy Mount Hood Medical Center. "The choice by Legacy administration to close the Family Birth Center and remove OB-GYN physicians from the patient care model is unsafe, hazardous and irresponsible. Per Legacy's mission statement: 'Our mission is for good health for our people, our patients, our communities and our world. Above all, we will do the right thing.' Legacy administration, this is not the right thing," said Teddy Glemser, emergency department charge nurse at Legacy Mount Hood Medical Center and a Family Birth Center patient.

In addition to their work to save the family birth center, frontline nurses at Legacy Mount Hood Medical Center filed for a union election to join the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) on March 6. Nurses cited a need to unionize to protect patients' access to safe, high-quality health care;

restore respect for frontline workers; and gain a voice in decisions that affect their community's health and welfare.

Oregon Health Authority has issued the following statement regarding Legacy Mount Hood Medical Center's request for a waiver that would allow it to discontinue maternity services at its Family Birth Center:

Oregon Health Authority (OHA) is highly concerned about reports that maternity patients at Legacy Mount Hood Medical Center are being redirected to other Legacy hospitals such as Randall Children's Hospital at Legacy Emanuel. OHA has not granted Legacy's waiver and is in the process of reviewing Legacy's responses to the many questions OHA posed to Legacy about its waiver request. OHA received Legacy's responses late on Friday, March 17. OHA has been very clear with Legacy that it cannot cease providing required maternity services at its Family Birth Center without receiving OHA approval of a waiver.

OHA will be investigating reports that Legacy has ceased providing maternity services.