

Legislative Intent Guide

What is the primary issue you hope to resolve through this bill?

License freestanding birth centers in Vermont

What long-term goals or desired goals would be met if this issue were resolved?

Vermont birthing families would have the option of care in a birth center.

What data and information helps illustrate the forces around the issue and unpack root causes?

Why should Vermont want Birth Centers?

Numerous studies and meta-analyses have shown that having a baby in a birth center is at least as safe as having a baby in a hospital for low-risk women. Starting labor with a midwife in a birth center confers a radically lower risk of interventions, such as epidurals, vacuum extraction, having perineal trauma requiring suturing and most drastically, cesarean section.

Every major birth center study in the last decade has shown a birth center c-section rate of between 4% and 6% with infant outcomes the same as low-risk populations delivering in hospital. The national C/S rate is 32%, Vermont's is 27%, and the national low risk rate is 26%. This means that the c/s rate for women choosing birth centers is at minimum 4 times lower than if those same women choose hospital birth, with the same level of safety. This has been shown to be true of medicaid beneficiaries as well as people with private insurance.

Additionally, care by midwives reduces the risk of preterm birth, which is a leading cause of neonatal mortality. Women receiving care from midwives report higher patient satisfaction and have higher rates of breastfeeding. Higher rates of breastfeeding lead to healthier infants which decreases the cost of pediatric care in the first year of life.

At a time when the C-section rate in America is more than double what the WHO recommends and the USA has the worst rate of maternal mortality in the developed world, birth centers should be enthusiastically encouraged.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services estimate that savings exceed \$2,000 per mother/infant pair when birthing parents choose a birth center.

What are the roadblocks to starting a birth center in Vermont?

1. The lack of state licensure precludes opening a birth center in Vermont

2. Medicaid reimbursement - Facilities are only eligible for payment by Medicaid and most private health plans if they are licensed. Health care providers must work in licensed facilities to be eligible for professional liability insurance. Vermont Medicaid will need to amend medicaid regulations to officially recognize birth

centers as facilities that can bill a facility fee. The facility fee is the primary income for a birth center and birth centers are not financially viable without it.

3. There should be no requirement for a Certificate of Need process. In states that do require that birth centers go through the CON process, most or all prospective birth centers are rejected due to strong hospital opposition. In the 1990s, there was a large community effort to open a freestanding birth center in Burlington, VT. This birth center was not created because of the CON process and opposition from the local hospital. The majority of states that license birth centers do not require a CON, and VT already has a statute that excludes outpatient healthcare provider offices from CON. Birth Centers will need to be explicitly exempt from CON, with the understanding that birth centers are limited to low risk maternity care and do not provide the same services as a hospital bed in the same community. There is no capability for surgical birth or anesthesia in a freestanding birth center; instead, there is intensive support for physiologic birth and postpartum care that includes home visits.

What is the specific change that you propose in this bill?

This bill proposes to establish a licensing structure for freestanding birth centers. It would also require prenatal, maternity, postpartum, and newborn coverage under health insurance plans and Medicaid to include birth center services. Finally, it would specify that birth centers are not subject to certificate of need review.

How does your proposed change address the driving forces or root causes of the issue?

These changes would make opening a birth center possible in Vermont.

What is the specific desired result of the changes you propose in this bill?

A clear avenue to licensure for birth centers, with CON exemption and health insurance coverage for birth center services.

How will you understand what happens as a result of this bill? What data and information will help demonstrate progress?

A growing number of individuals and families will be able to choose birth center care.