

Why I chose a birth center

My name is Carolyn Barnwell, and I've lived in VT for 11 years. I gave birth in a birth center.

Once I became pregnant, I took a popular online course called "Empowered Birth" which laid out three options for American women: birthing at a hospital, a free-standing birth center, or at home. I didn't know about birth centers before that course, but they seemed to be the perfect happy medium. And I couldn't find one in VT! For no good reason, there isn't a single free-standing birth center in VT.

Where and how to give birth was one of the most personal, multifaceted decisions I've ever made in my life.

I felt like the risk of a home birth while not living near a hospital was too high. And the thought of having a baby in a hospital made me uncomfortable... Pregnancy is not a sickness. Just given the hospital environment-- the potential germs, the beeping-- when I go in I feel tense and anxious.

I knew I would feel most at ease in a birth center. And I loved the idea of a more individualized experience.

I researched the data on birth centers, and I learned there is *less* risk in birthing at an accredited birth center, and better outcomes for moms and babies. And that's true *all the time*, not just during a global pandemic.

So, I was sold. I had *no doubts* when I chose a birth center birth. Then I was really disappointed to find out that there are no birth centers in VT.

I found a birth center in NH and signed up. I knew-- if I was to remain a low-risk pregnancy and remain eligible for an out-of-hospital birth-- the most important thing was that I feel safe and respected and *that* feeling would increase my chances of having an uncomplicated, unmedicated vaginal birth.

What my care was like

My care at the birth center was so good that I was honestly excited to give birth. Throughout my pregnancy, I had hour-long appointments with super-experienced midwives. They helped me make informed choices. They even sent me home with a book they had compiled with all the latest research on everything from what to eat to help with nausea to the vitamin-K shot offered to a newborn. And the birth center was a relaxing place to be, in a welcoming environment. It was world-class.

I remember thinking so many times, "THIS is an option I wish every woman had for their healthcare."

I had a swift, normal, unmedicated birth. It was everything we hoped for. Our baby was born in a big tub with my husband in there with me. It was one of the most empowered, intense, and beautiful experiences of my life. The three of us went right from the tub to snuggling in a king-sized bed.

Then the postpartum care was beyond what most mothers ever get. Rather than one postpartum appointment at 6 weeks, there were multiple home visits and appointments as well as unlimited text support from the midwives.

Why I think VT families should have this choice

While a birth center birth certainly isn't for everyone, it was absolutely the right choice for me and my family. Luckily they have birth centers in NH, and I was grateful to be able to go there and have the exact experience I hoped to have. VT families deserve to have this choice for quality and cost-effective care. It is proven.

It is so personal, and it is so important to feel cared for, safe and relaxed. I knew the place I would feel the most cared for, safe and relaxed was in a birth center. This is a reasonable, high-quality option that makes sense. Women should have this choice in VT.

I'm here to ask the Committee members to support S.18 so we can have birth centers in VT, too. Thank you.