



Coalition Urges BridgePoint Healthcare to restore OB services at Laurel Regional Hospital if acquired

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For Immediate Release

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BALTIMORE, MD (October 29, 2015) –Last week, a coalition aimed at protecting access to maternity care for women across Maryland urged BridgePoint Healthcare to restore obstetrical care services at Laurel Regional Hospital if is successful in its acquisition attempt. According to a recent media report, BridgePoint Healthcare is in discussions with Dimensions Healthcare System for the purposes of seeking to acquire Laurel Regional.

The report comes as Dimensions has just closed Laurel Regional Hospital's birthing center. But according to the exclusive report from the Washington Business Journal, BridgePoint Healthcare "*wants to continue acute care, emergency care, post-acute care and ambulatory services*" at Laurel Regional Hospital.

In a letter to the President and CEO of BridgePoint requesting a meeting, Maryland Maternity Access Coalition President Beth Laverick writes: "We urge BridgePoint to reinstitute obstetrical care and prenatal care related services in order to better serve expectant mothers in the greater Laurel area," in the event that Laurel Hospital is acquired by BridgePoint

As a result of the recent closure of Laurel Regional's maternity ward, Prince George's County now has only one hospital that provides a full-range of obstetrical healthcare services for women. In addition, women throughout the county struggle to find and access OBGYN physicians in their local communities.

In its letter, the Maternity Coalition notes that, Dimensions' reduction in obstetrical services not surprising. Nearly two years ago, Dimensions officials testified before the health committee of the Maryland General Assembly, warning that Maryland's litigation environment will force a reduction in obstetrical services, stating:

*"...Because of recent large verdicts, we are beginning to find that our reserves are threatened... We are becoming increasingly aware that it will be very difficult to justify continuing an obstetrical program under the current trajectory... **If something is not done soon, Dimensions will have to seriously contemplate the fiscal viability of the obstetrical program, and as a result of that, the population we serve, the population who can ill***

afford to lose service, will experience decreased access to obstetrical care in their immediate area, which would force them to travel for the needed care or make the choice to simply give up prenatal care and show up at any emergency department in order to deliver...” --2014 Dimensions Testimony to the Health & Government Operations Committee of the Maryland General Assembly [Embed link: <http://mgahouse.maryland.gov/mga/play/1c2ea92cd66f4654aad9acb1fb15ca7e/?catalog/03e481c7-8a42-4438-a7da-93ff74bdaa4c&playfrom=8285409>]

Additionally, the President of Laurel Regional has pointed to financial strains and rising medical liability costs as the reason for the closure, calling Obstetrics a “persistent problem”. Laurel Hospital President John Spearman stated: “the litigation environment and how that impacts the financial viability of hospitals is the exact kind of situation that we’re facing here,” according to the Baltimore Sun.

“While we are dedicated as a coalition to improving access to maternity care in the state, we fully understand that obstetrics has become a money-losing proposition for Maryland hospitals as a result of an unsustainable litigation environment resulting from multimillion dollar mega-verdicts in birth injury cases,” Laverick wrote in the letter to BridgePoint. “We believe that common-sense reforms such as No-Fault Birth Injury Fund will allow health care providers like BridgePoint to expand access to women’s services.”

“We invite BridgePoint to join our coalition of concerned citizens in support of legislative reforms to address Maryland’s crisis in obstetrical care,” Laverick concluded in the letter.

In late 2014, a Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Task Force urged the Maryland General Assembly to pursue the creation of a Birth Injury Fund – paid for by hospitals – to reduce medical liability risk in the field of obstetrics, in order to safeguard women’s access to maternity care ([State panel recommends creation of a birth injury fund](#), Baltimore Sun, 12/24/14).

The proposed fund, similar to ones that have been successfully in operation since the late 1980s in Florida and Virginia, enjoys bi-partisan support from voters across the state. [A statewide poll of 799 voters released last year](#) – conducted by OpinionWorks of Annapolis – found that Maryland voters support creating a birth injury fund by a 3-to-1 margin, with 62 percent in favor and only 21 percent opposed. In the poll, voters strongly support the concept of families giving up their right to sue in exchange for being guaranteed an award from the fund if a child suffers a permanent birth injury.

The Maryland Maternity Access Coalition is a broad a coalition of concerned citizens, organizations, and healthcare providers formed to protect and preserve access to high-quality maternity care for the women of Maryland. For more information on the Maryland Maternity Access Coalition, visit the coalition’s Facebook page and website at www.facebook.com/mdmaternityaccess and www.Mdmaternityaccess.org.

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