



Laurel Regional Maternity Ward First Inpatient Unit to Close Amid Downsizing

Maryland Maternity Access Coalition Releases Statement on Financial Fragility of Hospital Maternity Wards and Need for Medical Liability Reform

For Immediate Release

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BALTIMORE, MD (August 24, 2015) – Today, a coalition aimed at protecting access to maternity care for women across Maryland released a statement regarding the just announced October 11th closure of Laurel Regional Hospital’s maternity ward, which currently serves hundreds of pregnant women in Prince George’s County each year.

The October 11th closure of Maternal & Child Health marks the first inpatient unit to close at Laurel Regional Hospital. The Hospital’s leadership 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.

“With the closure of Laurel Regional Hospital’s maternity ward on October 11th, Prince George’s County will now have only one hospital that provides a full-range of obstetrical healthcare services for women,” said **Beth Laverick, Volunteer President of the Maryland Maternity Access Coalition**. “The closure of Laurel Regional should be a wake-up call for the Maryland General Assembly to take action to address the problem before it gets worse. The legislature should move to implement a Birth Injury Fund and other commonsense reforms to protect the financial viability of maternity services across Maryland.”

“The simple truth is that hospital maternity wards are becoming less financially viable, due in large part to Maryland’s worsening litigation environment related to multimillion dollar mega-verdicts in birth injury cases. As maternity wards continue to lose money, it’s only a matter of time before hospitals decide to shed the service altogether. Maryland is facing a looming maternity care crisis and seems to be repeating the mistakes of Philadelphia, where more than 13 hospitals closed their maternity wards over a decade and women now struggle to access care,” concluded Laverick.

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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