



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Press Contact**

AlexAnn Westlake

Executive Director & Certified Nurse Midwife

(540) 820-2751

OurCommunityBirthCenter@gmail.com

## **PANDEMIC HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR LOCAL FREESTANDING BIRTH CENTER**

*Our Community Birth Center continues planning and fundraising*

Eugene, OR – March 23, 2020 – Pregnant people in Lane County are looking for options and finding their choices limited. Amid an urgent need to limit the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), and conserve hospital resources for those in critical condition, freestanding birth center options in Lane County are non-existent.

In order to improve health outcomes in our community and support and empower families from preconception through parenting, Our Community Birth Center is working hard to start a community-based nurse midwifery birth center and health clinic in the Eugene-Springfield Area. Our Community Birth Center is a new local nonprofit that launched a capital campaign in November 2019 to raise \$775,000 to develop a birth center and restore the 40-plus year tradition of safe and highly sought after birth center services in Lane County.

We are grateful for our local hospitals and health care providers and the life saving care they provide when health problems arise. However, healthy pregnant people are concerned about COVID-19 and are looking for ways to reduce exposure risk for themselves and for their newborn babies. "Birth Centers can provide a safe haven for families during this pandemic," said AlexAnn Westlake, Executive Director and Certified Nurse Midwife. "Exposure risk reduction occurs naturally with birth center care due to smaller numbers of staff, medical standard cleaning and disinfecting procedures, easy 24-7 phone access to midwives and staff, and the option for postpartum home visits for both mom and baby so that parents do not have to leave home with their newborn."

When PeaceHealth closed the community's longtime freestanding Nurse Midwifery Birth Center last summer, the narrowing of services left many families longing for a freestanding birth center. Today, with hospital beds at a premium and the risk of COVID-19 exposure at the forefront of many people's minds, expecting parents are looking for options that don't tie up precious and costly hospital resources. Cecilia Woods is a mother of two (ages 2 and 5), both

born at the former Nurse Midwifery Birth Center. She is currently pregnant with her third child and is due to give birth in the next few weeks. “The hospital is taking precautions, but it’s scary to go somewhere where they are taking care of sick people,” said Woods. “There is still a huge lack of information known about COVID-19 in pregnancy and babies.”

Further, Woods’ parents were planning to help with child care upon delivery, but concerns over the virus and exposure to older adults have put those plans in jeopardy. She said the birth center is needed now more than ever. “The fact that it’s only pregnant and laboring mothers, they’re healthy, it’s already isolated, there’s not a lot of exposure... We really wish we had that right now.”

While birth centers can play an integral role in providing excellent care during a pandemic, research shows that birth centers improve health outcomes and lower health care costs every day. The Strong Start for Mothers and Newborns Initiative (2018), a national study funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, found that Medicaid recipients receiving birth center care had better outcomes and lower costs relative to Medicaid recipients with similar characteristics who did not receive birth center care. Key findings include:

- Lower costs for each mother-infant pair of \$2,010
- Fewer infant emergency department visits and hospitalizations
- Fewer low birth weight babies
- Lower preterm birth rate
- Fewer cesarean births

Dr. Vern Katz, retired obstetrician/perinatologist from Eugene, strongly believes that communities should have birth centers that provide a safe alternative for childbirth. “Any type of emergency or strain on the healthcare system highlights the importance of a birth center,” he said, noting that resources tighten as hospitals fill up. “The birth center is not for everybody, but it is a safe, reliable, and effective place to give birth for many, many women, especially in a strapped health care system, especially during a pandemic.”

While Lane County currently lacks the freestanding birth center that so many pregnant people in our community demand, progress is being made. Our Community Birth Center has already raised nearly \$80,000 toward the capital campaign goal and continues to fundraise. “Our society is going to keep going and we’re still going to need a birth center after this pandemic,” said Dr. Katz.

What can we all do right now to help support families in our community?

- 1) Donate to Our Community Birth Center at [www.ourcommunitybirthcenter.org/donate](http://www.ourcommunitybirthcenter.org/donate) to help restore care for future pregnant people.
- 2) Call your health insurance providers, your elected officials, the Oregon Health Authority, and local Oregon Health Plan providers (Trillium and Pacific Source) and urge them to expand and simplify coverage of out-of-hospital birth.
- 3) Visit our website, [www.ourcommunitybirthcenter.org/new-clients](http://www.ourcommunitybirthcenter.org/new-clients) for a list of midwifery, birth center, and home birth options in or near Lane County.

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Please use the contact information below to contact us directly to learn more or stay up to date.

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**Social Media**

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/ourcommunitybirthcenter](http://www.facebook.com/ourcommunitybirthcenter)

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