

To Whom It May Concern,

I write you today to offer my testimony as to the critical issue surrounding the lack of maternal health care in Northern New York. With the urbanization of the state, rural communities continue to face challenges in accessing appropriate and adequate healthcare services, and the lack of providers available has led to mortality and morbidity concerns.

Beyond that core component, which is important to address for the general Northern population, please consider the availability of care for the Indigenous population as well. The community of Akwesasne (St. Regis Mohawk Tribe) does not have a hospital on the territory, so tribal members must utilize hospitals miles away in local towns such as Malone, Potsdam and Massena. Potsdam is the nearest hospital with a maternity ward now that Massena's has closed. Potsdam is anywhere from 35 minutes-50 minutes away from the reservation, depending on which area you are in. This distance delays appropriate access to care, especially in emergent situations.

Community members face many concerns of racism and neglect in their care at area facilities such as Alice Hyde Memorial and the Massena Memorial Hospital. Unfortunately these instances of racism and neglect have led to the loss of pregnancies and have led to longstanding health issues for those who were treated poorly, which goes unaddressed by the hospitals and local health departments. Currently midwifery practices that exist in this area do not provide culturally safe care, and have led to catastrophic outcomes for Indigenous people utilizing these services, including maternal and fetal compromise and neglect. This is clearly unacceptable and why I chose to join the NYS DOH Maternal Health Task Force to begin with.

Through the allowance of CPM's to practice in New York State you open up more avenues to care and for Indigenous CPM's to practice within their communities, which mitigates risks and provides overall better care at a vital time.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Benedict.