

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 20, 2023

Carole Johnson
Administrator
Health Resources and Services Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Administrator Johnson:

We write in support of the application submitted by Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital for funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Rural Maternity and Obstetrics Management Strategies (RMOMS) program (Funding Opportunity Number: HRSA-23-049). Federal aid from HRSA would enable Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital to work alongside partners in the North Country Maternity Network – a formally established network of hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers and other community partners – to improve access to prenatal, postpartum and birthing care in rural Coos and northern Grafton Counties of New Hampshire (NH).

The closure of hospital birthing units in this region has threatened the already modest care system for pregnant and parenting women. Over the past two decades, three of the five critical access hospitals in NH's North Country closed inpatient labor and delivery units. The remaining two hospitals are at risk of closure due to operating losses, unfavorable payor mix, and workforce and other challenges. As a result, pregnant women in northern NH face growing challenges accessing maternity care due to geographic and infrastructure challenges, subsequent loss of maternity care providers, distances to care, limited road networks, lack of broadband, transportation in winter conditions and lack of public transportation. These challenges lead to inadequate prenatal care, unplanned deliveries en route to the hospital or in hospital emergency departments without labor and delivery services, higher preterm birth rates, lower infant birthweight and lower rates of breastfeeding compared to the rest of NH.

With support from HRSA, Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital and the hospitals, providers and community partners in the North Country Maternity Network would address factors contributing to poor perinatal outcomes for people in this economically stressed and underserved rural service area. Partners would focus on providing comprehensive maternal health risk assessment and linkage to care at the appropriate level; enhancing access through community-based pre- and postnatal care; linking perinatal care providers to ensure seamless transitions of care; improving perinatal health outcomes including prematurity and low-birthweight; and reducing severe maternal morbidity and mortality.

We strongly support this application from Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital and urge its full and fair consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact any of our offices if you have further questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress