

**For immediate release**

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**Windham Hospital announces plans to discontinue childbirth services while enhancing women's health services**

**WINDHAM** – After years of declining births and recruitment challenges, the Windham Hospital Birthing Center is seeking State approval to no longer provide childbirth services.

The rest of the pregnancy experience remains the same, with prenatal and postpartum care continuing at Windham Hospital. The hospital, which ranks last in Connecticut for number of births this year, has plans to enhance its women's health services as part of a larger, long-term strategy to provide the highest quality, coordinated care.

"This was a difficult decision, but one that has been years in the making. We have exhausted all other options," said Donna Handley, President of Hartford HealthCare's East Region, which includes Windham and Backus hospitals. "We have worked hard to create a safe, innovative plan that provides the highest level of care for the mothers and babies we serve."

**The plan**

The hospital has created a comprehensive plan that includes transportation to Backus Hospital in Norwich, which is 17 miles away, or another location chosen by the patient.

Windham has notified the State Department of Public Health that it will soon file public notice and subsequently a Certificate of Need application with the Office of Health Strategy requesting approval to officially close the service. The labor and delivery staff will have opportunities to work in other departments within the hospital.

The Women's Health Services program at Windham Hospital will continue to offer comprehensive care and is welcoming new patients. Staff will assist in coordinating expectant mothers' delivery at other hospitals.

Windham will continue to enhance its women's health offerings, including breast health, women's cardiology, uro-gynecology and integrative health services. This is in addition to Hartford HealthCare's investment in the community, including a recent upgrade to the latest 3D mammography, installing a new SPEC CT nuclear imaging machine, and recruiting primary care, general surgery, and more specialists to the region so that patients have better access to care locally.

**Details**

Windham Hospital's childbirth services are currently suspended, and expectant mothers are being informed of plans in place to ensure safe care. Highlights of the plan include the following:

- As part of patients' prenatal care, a delivery plan will be discussed and coordinated so that patients can choose to deliver at Backus Hospital or another hospital of their choice.
- Windham Hospital will continue to provide free transportation to mothers and families in need of childbirth services.
- The Windham Hospital Emergency Department staff is fully trained in the assessment of expectant mothers, and will coordinate a safe transfer of the newborn and mother. In the event of a medical emergency, Windham Hospital Emergency Department staff is trained and qualified to deliver babies.
- Windham Hospital has coordinated access to other women's health offerings, including breast health, women's cardiology, uro-gynecology and integrative health services.

Handley said she has shared the hospital's plan with union representatives, hospital staff, legislators who represent the Windham region, state officials and many community leaders. The hospital will also work closely with local medical providers to ensure that doctors, expectant mothers and their families are informed and know where to seek care.

"Having a clear plan, and a good path forward for our community — rather than a series of stopgap solutions — is the right thing to do and is in the best interests of our mothers and babies," Handley said. "That is important to me as a healthcare leader, a mother and a nurse."

#### **A longstanding issue**

Windham Hospital has been experiencing a steady decline in the number of births — from more than 400 births in 2012 to a projected 93 this year. "Mothers are choosing to have their babies at hospitals that perform a greater number of births," Handley said. "I understand and support the decision for mothers to choose what is best for themselves and their babies."

Since January, the hospital has delivered only 31 babies. When no OB physician coverage was available at Windham, the hospital secured free transportation for expectant mothers.

Windham-area women who recently had their babies at Backus "have had exceptional, safe care and have said they were really pleased with their childbirth experience," said Daryl Hurlock, RN, Regional Director for Women's Health Services. "A safe delivery in a fully staffed childbirth center is what we want for mom and baby."

The hospital will host a virtual public forum to discuss the decision and the plans with members of the community. More information about the public forum will be issued in the coming weeks.