

7/18/2025

Ms. Debra Savage
Chairwoman
Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board
525 W. Jefferson Street
Springfield, IL 62761

Re: CON Project 25-013
Discontinuation of ICU and Obstetrics services
OSF Saint Elizabeth Medical Center - Ottawa

Dear Chairwoman Savage:

I am writing in support of the project to discontinue ICU and Obstetrics services at OSF Saint Elizabeth Medical Center - Ottawa. The discontinuations are part of the commitment made by OSF to close these services in Ottawa upon their relocation to OSF Saint Elizabeth Medical Center - Peru. The opening of the services in Peru will occur in August.

As a physician with 23 years of experience practicing in this community, I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed care model and service transitions at OSF HealthCare. I have witnessed the evolution of rural health firsthand and believe these changes represent a proactive, sustainable, and community-focused response to the unique challenges we face.

OSF HealthCare has developed a thoughtful, coordinated, and comprehensive approach to care—particularly in obstetrics and critical care—that positions our region for long-term success. In a time when rural hospitals across the country are scaling back, OSF is leaning in, strengthening services and investing in innovative ways to maintain access for those who need it most.

Regarding maternal and child health, the decline in obstetric programs across Illinois has been stark—falling from 118 programs in 2016 to just 86 in 2023, with even fewer remaining in rural areas. Only 57% of rural hospitals still offer inpatient OB services.

Rather than retreating, OSF is working to safeguard access to OB care across the entire region. With full inpatient labor and delivery unit, robust prenatal and postpartum services, and the integration of telehealth and remote monitoring, OSF is not just maintaining services—it is expanding and modernizing them. Expectant mothers can receive the care and education they need through local clinics, digital platforms, and coordinated in-person services that ensure continuity and compassion throughout the perinatal experience.

This model is about more than delivering babies, it's about supporting healthy families. OSF's vision ensures that future generations can be born and thrive right here at home. It reflects a bold, long-term commitment to maternal and child health in rural Illinois.

The same commitment is evident in OSF's approach to intensive care. The decision to consolidate ICU services in Peru is a strategic and necessary step to sustain high-quality, high-acuity care across the Illinois Valley. By focusing on ICU-level services in one location, OSF can recruit and retain specialized providers and maintain the clinical volume needed to ensure safety, expertise, and excellence in care delivery.

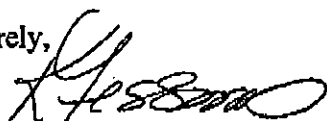
Peru's infrastructure is well-suited to support this level of care, and the regional model allows patients from surrounding communities—including Ottawa, Princeton, Mendota, and Streator—to access emergency care, diagnostics, and follow-up locally, while complex care is efficiently managed just minutes away. This improves outcomes and ensures sustainability, even as many rural hospitals across the country face closures or service reductions.

As a Clinical Assistant Professor and Director of the Rural Medical Education Program at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford, I also see these changes as beneficial for training the next generation of rural physicians. Providing medical students with strong, sustainable rural practice environments is essential to building a health care workforce that is ready to serve rural communities for decades to come.

I urge you to support these proposed changes. They represent not a loss, but an opportunity, a proactive strategy to strengthen care, protect access, and invest in the long-term health of our region.

I urge the members of the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board to approve the project for the discontinuation.

Sincerely,



Kara Fess, MD

Internal Director of Quality and Staff Physician at OSF Midtown Clinic and Saint Elizabeth Hospital Ottawa and Peru

Clinical Assistant Professor
Director, Rural Medical Education Program
University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford

C: Karen Brodbeck, Director of Public Relations, OSF HealthCare
Mark Hohulin, Senior Vice President, Healthcare Analytics, OSF HealthCare