

October 28, 2025

Dear Members of the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board,

I am writing on behalf of registered nurses caring for patients in Ascension hospitals in Kansas, Texas, and Maryland, who have long been concerned about Ascension's closures of maternity wards and chronic understaffing of obstetrics services. When we heard about Ascension closing yet another labor and delivery unit at Alexian Brothers Medical Center, we wanted to share our opposition to the closure, along with our experiences and research into Ascension's obstetrics practices. Enclosed is a copy of our report, "Dangerous Descent: How Ascension Betrays its Mission by Gutting Care for Pregnant Patients and Babies," written in response to nurses and communities across the country alerting us to Ascension's disinvestment in maternal and newborn care.

In the United States, there is an infant and maternal mortality crisis. In Illinois, this crisis is particularly acute and is further widening longstanding racial disparities. According to a 2023 report by the Illinois Department of Public Health, there were 27 pregnancy-related mortalities per 100,000 live births. The likelihood of dying from a pregnancy-related cause was nearly twice as high for Black women as for white women.¹

Over the past few years, infant mortality has crept up and is higher than the national average. The preterm birth rate in Illinois was scored a D by national advocacy group March of Dimes.² The context of Ascension's closure of Alexian Brothers' labor and delivery unit spells trouble for an already strained obstetrics health care system. Studies show that longer travel distances or increased travel times following an obstetric unit closure may decrease the utilization of prenatal care, along with higher rates of stress and anxiety. Babies of mothers and pregnant patients who did not receive prenatal care are three times more likely to have a low birth rate and five times as likely to die, compared to mothers and pregnant patients who received care.³

Rather than investing to expand access to labor and delivery services, Ascension has been a driving force in cutting care. As further detailed in our report, Ascension has closed 16 labor and delivery departments over the past decade, primarily in low-income Medicaid reliant communities. By our calculations, that accounts for over a quarter of Ascension's labor and delivery departments that existed in 2012. In Illinois alone, Ascension closed two labor and delivery units between 2012 and 2021.

¹ <https://dph.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/idph/publications/idph/topics-and-services/life-stages-populations/maternal-child-family-health-services/maternal-health/mmmr/maternal-morbidity-mortality-report2023.pdf>

² <https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/reports/illinois/report-card>

³ <https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/prenatalcare>

Ascension is closing maternity wards at not only higher rates than the national average but is also chronically understaffing many of its obstetrics units it still maintains. As Ascension nurses have found in Wichita and Austin after Ascension closed local labor and delivery units and consolidated care, Ascension did not staff the obstetrics units to account for the influx of new patients. As this is the plan with the closure of Alexian Brothers, to consolidate care at St. Alexius Medical Center, we fear Ascension will follow its familiar patterns of understaffing obstetrics services.

We want all patients to have access to high-quality maternal and infant health services. Ascension leadership's betrayal of its mission to provide accessible and quality care to communities is unacceptable. We urge the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board to deny the Alexian Brothers' request for exemption for a Certificate of Need, and their application for exemption for the discontinuation of the 28-bed obstetric category of service at Alexian Brothers Medical Center, 800 Biesterfield Road, Elk Grove Village, Illinois (#E-008-25).

Sincerely,

Mateos Chekol
NNU/NNOC Ascension Division Director