

S. 4079, The Rural Obstetrics Readiness Act

*Sponsored by Senators Hassan (D-NH), Collins (R-ME),
Britt (R-AL) and Smith (D-MN)*

A bill that aims to help rural health care facilities get the training and tools needed to respond to obstetric emergencies.

Background: Between 2011 and 2021, over 260 rural hospitals in the U.S. shut down their obstetrics services, representing one in four of the nation's rural obstetric units.¹ This has left more than 2 million women in a maternity care desert, meaning that they live in a county without a provider offering obstetric care such as labor and delivery.²

In areas where there are no obstetric services, emergency departments and other health care facilities play a vital role in maternal and infant health. In these areas, women who are pregnant, postpartum, or in labor often come to emergency rooms at facilities that do not have obstetricians. Obstetric readiness programs such as training, equipment, and simulation can support non-obstetric providers in treating patients experiencing an obstetric emergency. There are no existing targeted federal grants to help rural hospitals obtain the training and equipment needed to increase their obstetric readiness.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that more than 80 percent of maternal deaths associated with pregnancy and birth would be preventable with timely maternal health care.³ As obstetric services disappear in rural areas, women face maternity care deserts and must travel farther to receive maternal health care.

Congress must act now to stop the growing number of obstetric closures and widening maternity care deserts.

Summary: The Rural Obstetrics Readiness Act, introduced by Senators Hassan, Collins, Britt, and Smith, would provide new opportunities for rural health care facilities to help them respond to obstetric emergencies:

- Directs the Health Resources and Services Administration's Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health to create an obstetric emergency training program for rural health care facilities that do not have a dedicated labor & delivery unit;
- Establishes new federal grants for rural health care facilities to purchase necessary equipment to carry out obstetrics readiness training and response;
- Creates a pilot program to support a statewide or regional network of obstetric and maternal health care teams that can provide urgent teleconsultation to rural facilities; and
- Directs HHS to study maternity ward closures, regional patterns of patient transport, and models for regional partnerships for rural obstetric care.

The bill is endorsed by the National Rural Health Association, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American College of Emergency Physicians, American Academy of Family Practitioners, American Society of Anesthesiologists, MomsRising, Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs.

¹ <https://www.chartis.com/insights/maternal-care-deserts-expand-amid-persistent-wave-ob-maternity-service-closures>

² <https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/data/top=23>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p0919-pregnancy-related-deaths.html>