



CHRIS LARSON

STATE SENATOR

March 31st, 2023

Honorable members of the Milwaukee Common Council;

First of all, I would like to thank Alders Marina Dimitrijevic, JoCasta Zamarripa, and Scott Spiker for their leadership in introducing Substitute Resolution #221869, regarding the operations of Ascension Wisconsin and its member hospitals in the Milwaukee area.

I respectfully submit this letter of support for the above-named resolution, in my capacity as State Senator of Wisconsin's 7th Senate District. The district encompasses a substantial portion of the City of Milwaukee, as well as the entirety of Saint Francis, South Milwaukee, Cudahy, Oak Creek, and parts of Franklin.

Hospitals and other health clinics are not just valued local businesses, they are vital institutions that serve as anchors of our communities. Most of us begin and end our lives in hospitals, and these facilities are the backdrop to many of our most joyous and tragic moments in between. I'll never forget the arrival of my two children, Atticus and Stella, and for decades, Ascension St. Francis has been the site of countless other moments such as these for the families of all backgrounds living on Milwaukee's South Side and surrounding communities.

That is, of course, until just before Christmas last year, when Ascension Wisconsin abruptly pulled the rug out from underneath expecting parents and even their own staff, by announcing the end of labor and delivery services at this essential neighborhood hospital, leaving Milwaukee's South Side without a birthing unit for the first time in recent memory.

In an effort to avoid jumping to conclusions and be as fair as possible, I have made significant efforts to communicate with all stakeholders involved - Ascension leadership, health professionals (including Ascension staff), and community members. I also reviewed the federally-mandated Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) of Ascension St. Francis.

I have concluded that while Ascension's decision to close labor and delivery services at St. Francis Hospital may make sense on a balance sheet, it makes zero sense from a patient care standpoint, particularly from a tax-exempt nonprofit organization with billions of dollars in cash reserves, a self-proclaimed mission from God to serve "all persons, with special attention to those who are poor and vulnerable," and a promise to provide "holistic care which sustains and improves the health of individuals and communities."

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Cutting off access to birthing services at a neighborhood hospital like St. Francis (which happens to be located in the ZIP Code with the highest birth rate in Milwaukee County) is a slap in the face to the very community they're mission-bound to serve. As Senator Tammy Baldwin noted recently in a public statement, it calls into question whether Ascension Wisconsin deserves its tax-exempt, "nonprofit" status.

I hereby call on Ascension Wisconsin to voluntarily commit to the tenets of Substitute Resolution #221869, and to use the opportunity provided by its recent executive leadership changes to make real, substantive improvements to its partnership with the communities it has sworn to serve. Failure to do so will send a clear signal to lawmakers in our legislature, myself included, that regulatory reform of Wisconsin's nonprofit hospitals may very well be in order.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Larson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the left of the main body of the letter.