



**Troy Mayor Wm. Patrick Madden**  
City Hall  
433 River Street  
Troy, New York 12180



**Assemblymember John T. McDonald, III**  
LOB 625  
Albany, New York 12248

Dr. James V. McDonald M.D., M.P.H.  
Commissioner  
New York State Department of Health  
Corning Tower  
Empire State Plaza,  
Albany, NY 12237

August 29, 2023

Dear Commissioner McDonald,

We are writing to request additional opportunities for public input related to the proposed closure of Samaritan Hospital's Burdett Birthing Center in Troy, NY.

We are concerned that the community survey administered by Chartis Center for Health Equity & Belonging (Chartis) on behalf of Trinity Health and St. Peter's Health Partners was not adequately accessible, misleading and confusing in the wording of questions and answer options, and not available for a length of time that could credibly be claimed to have allowed for meaningful input from the community regarding the curtailment of services proposed by Trinity Health and St. Peter's Health Partners.

The survey was shared by Chartis with Troy City Hall at an afternoon meeting on August 23, 2023, where Mayor Madden and Deputy Mayor Nolin were also told the survey would close on August 28, 2023. That left City Hall and local stakeholders with only five days to disseminate the survey, engage the public and solicit input.

Other community leaders were not apprised of the survey at all. Assemblymember John McDonald found out that the survey was available from press materials and social media posts disseminated by the Mayor's Office; not directly from Chartis.

There have been technical issues with the survey and most concerning was an issue that we brought to the attention of St. Peter's Health Partners (SPHP) on August 30, 2023 related to the last required question on the survey. Question 11 of the survey (this question required an answer to complete the survey) asked

“Are you a member of any of the following medically underserved group(s)?” and then had a drop down menu that did not provide an option to select “no.” A participant could not proceed without selecting an underserved group and instead, through trial and error, would need to select “other.” They were then prompted to “Specify 'Other' or describe your racial and/or ethnic group(s).” This created unnecessary confusion, because some participants thought they could only participate if they were a member of an underserved group since there was not a specific option to select “no.” While our outreach on this specific survey issue was addressed promptly, it is likely that people who already tried to participate in the survey may not have submitted their responses due to that question and limited answer options. We have had to reach out on numerous technical issues with the survey and it has impeded the ability of members of the public to meaningfully participate in what has been an incredibly flawed process.

While our advocacy regarding the issues related to the survey resulted in an extension of the survey deadline to September 1, 2023, this extension was not publicly communicated and there is no option to report issues with the survey or contact information for any questions. The community must be consulted thoughtfully and in diverse modalities to be accessible to all. Since the beginning of this process, when Trinity made the announcement, there has been a major loss of trust between Trinity and the community. This ‘fast, get-it-done approach’ to the survey, combined with an egregious lack of community outreach, does not help rebuild that trust. Our focus is on finding solutions; however, the rollout of this survey has included critical omissions and errors that are eroding the public trust and moving us away from the vital conversation of maintaining maternity services in Rensselaer County and addressing the needs of our residents.

This is a first-of-a-kind health and equity assessment in our state, and our experience in local and state government have informed us that taking a measured and thorough approach is more inclusive and reflective of the community. We believe that the current approach is not only unfair to the Troy and Upstate families who rely on the services of the Burdett Birthing Center, but an inauspicious precedent to set about what constitutes an acceptable level of public input for a process regarding the proposed closure of the only birthing center across three contiguous counties.

While New York State’s maternal mortality rate is better than the national average, a rate that hovers around 18 deaths per 100,000 births is unacceptable in New York State, the economic center of one of the wealthiest nations in the world. And according to the Centers for Disease Control, Black women are nine times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related complication in New York State, and five times more likely to die than the national average. This is an embarrassment, and thus a reasonable expectation of a health equity impact assessment would be an emphasis on collecting feedback from Black and brown women and families in particular.

There **must** be additional opportunities for the public to provide input on this proposed closure plan, and we urge the Department of Health to engage with us to solicit this community input before the conclusion of the health equity impact assessment.

Sincerely,



Hon. Wm. Patrick Madden  
Mayor, City of Troy



Hon. John T. McDonald III, RPh  
NYS 108th Assembly District