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Washington Home Birth Rate Among *Highest* in the Nation

To reduce state health care costs and meet the growing demand for licensed midwives, family advocates urge lawmakers to maintain the cap on midwife licensing fees

A recent *Centers for Disease Control report*¹ placed Washington among the top eight states in the nation in terms of babies born at home. In the last five years the number of families choosing birth at home has more than doubled. Kristin Effland, Vice-President of the Midwives' Association of Washington State, points out that for low-risk pregnant women, high quality midwifery care with home and birth center options are not only the most cost-effective approach to maternity care, they are among the safest options. Low-risk births with midwives at home or in free-standing birth centers result in a 50% reduction in cesarean sections which carry higher risks for complications like infection, neonatal intensive care admissions, longer postpartum recovery time and potentially life-threatening placental problems in future pregnancies.

“Our state is in a fiscal crisis, our maternity care is in crisis with one in three women undergoing major surgery to bring their babies into the world,” Effland says. “Increasing access to licensed midwifery care in every region in our state is the humane solution to both of these crises, and those we elect to govern us have a responsibility to step up and make it happen.”

The good news: millions of dollars² continue to be saved for Washington State due to the increase in births at home and in freestanding birth centers. The bad news: the number of licensed midwives has fallen below the demand. Currently there are only 110 licensed midwives practicing in Washington State. And that, says Effland, is a critically low supply. Over 100 Midwives and advocates from around Washington traveled to Olympia for a Lobby Day this month to urge state lawmakers to maintain the current cap on midwife licensing fees--a move that would allow more qualified providers to enter practice--and to pass HB 2186 which would take steps toward expanding the utilization of licensed midwives in all birth settings.

“Increased access to midwifery care with home and freestanding birth center options is a critical part of the solution to Washington State’s runaway health care costs,” says Effland.

Now is the time for lawmakers to keep the cap on licensing fees, pass HB 2186, and save Washington State millions on their tightening budget.

For more information on HB 2186, the Midwives’ Association of Washington State (MAWS) or the new data released by the National Center for Health Statistics, please contact MAWS Vice-President Kristin Effland at 206-498-2750 or vicepresident@WashingtonMidwives.org.

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MAWS works to promote the health and well-being of women and babies through the development and support of the profession of midwifery. Visit the web site at www.washingtonmidwives.org.

¹CDC Report: *Home Births in the United States, 1990–2009*. NCHS Data Brief, Number 84, January 2012.
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db84.htm>

²Cost-benefit analysis commissioned by Washington State Department of Health, 2008