

## READERS' FORUM



JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Brianna Smith-Thomson, a 35-year-old mother of three, was reflected in a mirror last month as she held her 5-month-old daughter, Serenity, while her daughter Heavyn, 4, watched television in the living room of the family's Lynn home.

# Maternal health gaps expose cracks in our fragmented system

### We know what works for mothers and families, but our policies fail

Thank you to Sarah Rahal for exposing Massachusetts' maternal health crisis ("Amid vaunted health care, gaps in delivery," Page A1, April 5). This is not an inevitable trend — it is the result of policy choices.

### Midwife-led care in freestanding birth centers delivers better outcomes and lower costs.

Underinvestment, hospital and birth center closures, and failure to address inequities are driving preventable harm and widening disparities.

We already know what works. Midwife-led care

in racial inequities.

Yet Massachusetts effectively has just one operating freestanding birth center (itself at risk of closure), with one re-opening in July after six years, another planned for fall 2027, and another still in development. For a state known for health care leadership, we are far behind where we should be.

If we are serious about saving lives and closing gaps, we must invest in midwifery education and guaranteeing sustainable reimbursement. Legislation is on the table on Beacon Hill in both the House and Senate. The time for study has passed; continued inaction is a choice, and families are paying the price.

MICHELE HELGESON

*Sudbury*

DR. JUDYANN BIGBY

*Jamaica Plain*

JUDY NORSIGIAN

*Newton*

*Helgeson is a certified nurse-midwife and cofounder of The Midwife Solution. Bigby is former Massachusetts secretary of health and human services. Norsigian is cofounder of Our Bodies Ourselves.*

### Inequities extend well beyond delivery room

As the state with the highest percentage of insured residents (nearly 98 percent), it is troubling that Massachusetts is falling behind in maternal care and, even worse, that disparities in that care are so pronounced.

Worsening maternal outcomes and stark racial disparities are the predictable result of a system that has never

been designed to serve everyone equitably. The loss of maternal care hospital capacity is part of the story, and it sits atop deeper, longstanding barriers to care for people of color.

The scale of this inequity extends well beyond the delivery room. A 2023 analysis estimated that racial health inequities cost the Commonwealth \$5.9 billion annually — a reflection of systemic gaps in how care is delivered and experienced across communities, including during pregnancy and birth.

Massachusetts faces growing fiscal instability, including fallout from the "One Big Beautiful Bill" that will reduce federal revenue to the state and strip MassHealth coverage from up to 300,000 of our fellow residents. MassHealth covers a significant share of births in the Commonwealth, and when access becomes more constrained, mothers and families suffer and inequities deepen.

This is the moment to keep pushing forward. The state, alongside health plans and providers, must sustain and accelerate its focus: heeding the upcoming recommendations of the Maternal Health Access and Birthing Patient Safety Task Force; investing in workforce; protecting coverage, particularly for those most at risk; and expanding access to professional doula care, which is critical to wellness throughout the birthing process. Doing so is how we improve outcomes for all families and close the gaps that persist across our system.

FILAINE DERONNETTE

*Cochair*

*Health Equity Compact*

*Boston*

### On the car ride, Bob Mueller told me his aspiration: 'to be director of the FBI'

Robert Mueller, who died last month at 81, was my law partner at the now-defunct Boston law firm Hill & Barlow for just under a year in the late 1980s. We worked closely together on major litigation in federal court in Washington, D.C., and Massachusetts for one of the firm's clients.

In 1989, as the Massachusetts case neared trial, Bob disappeared for almost the entire week before jury selection was to begin. We had divided responsibilities for the trial; while I was working on my parts, I was not as familiar with Bob's. Not being able to find him was a problem.

On Friday late afternoon of that week, Bob appeared at the threshold of my office. He quickly said, "I owe you an apology." He then



SUSAN WALSH/AP

Robert S. Mueller III in 2026.

explained that he had been in Washington with the US attorney general, Dick Thornburgh, who had offered him the position of special attorney general for terrorism after the Pan Am 103 attack (the Lockerbie bombing). He then told me that he had accepted that position but would not leave the firm until after our trial.

Bob returned to my office a few hours later and offered me a ride home. He lived in Wellesley and could pass through Auburndale on his way home. We talked mostly about trial prep and strategy.

While stopped at a traffic light, Bob turned to me and said, "I bet you think I'm crazy to leave Hill & Barlow and take this new position." From the closed and buttoned-down Bob whom I knew, this struck me as an odd query. I simply responded, "Well, Bob, it depends on what your goals are for your career."

In a low, thoughtful voice, Bob responded, "I want to be the director of the FBI."

That was 1989. Bob left Hill & Barlow and pursued his amazing career. After President George W. Bush nominated him as FBI director in July 2001, I wrote to congratulate him and to remind him of our car ride 12 years earlier.

Several months later, after the attacks of Sept. 11, I received Bob's response. In typical fashion, he briefly apologized for his "belated reply," excusing himself only by saying that "we have been fully engaged in the investigation to identify and bring to justice the individuals responsible for the horrific attacks of September 11th on the United States." I still have the letter.

RICHARD ALFRED

*Auburndale*

## The Boston Globe

Founded 1872

JOHN W. HENRY  
*Publisher*

LINDA PIZZUTI HENRY  
*Chief Executive Officer*

BRIAN McGRORY  
*Editor*

JAMES DAO  
*Editorial Page Editor*

DHIRAJ NAYAR *President*

CRISTINA SILVA *Managing Editor/Local News*

### DEPUTY MANAGING EDITORS

Marjorie Pritchard *Editorial Page*  
Anica Butler *Local News*  
Brian Bergstein *Ideas*  
Jeneé Osterheldt *Culture, Talent, & Development*  
Heather Ciras *Audience Engagement*  
Francis Storrs *Special Projects & Enterprise*  
Cynthia Needham *Innovation & Strategy*

### SENIOR ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITORS

Mary Creane *Production*  
Alan Wirzbicki *Editorial Page*  
Andrew Caffrey *News & Enterprise*  
Chris Morris *Living/Arts*

### SPOTLIGHT EDITOR

Brendan McCarthy

### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Dan Krockmalnic *Chief Operating Officer & General Counsel*  
Angus Macaulay *Chief Commercial Officer*  
Anthony Bonfiglio *Chief Technology Officer*  
Tom Brown *Chief Consumer Revenue Officer*  
Josh Russell *VP, Print Operations*  
Michelle Micone *Chief Marketing & Strategic Initiatives Officer*  
Rodrigo Tajonar *Chief People Officer*  
Matt Karolian *VP, Platforms & AI*  
Chris Zelen *Chief Financial Officer*

### Charles H. Taylor

*Founder & Publisher 1873-1921*  
William O. Taylor *Publisher 1921-1955*  
Wm. Davis Taylor *Publisher 1955-1977*  
William O. Taylor *Publisher 1978-1997*  
Benjamin B. Taylor *Publisher 1997-1999*  
Richard H. Gilman *Publisher 1999-2006*  
P. Steven Ainsley *Publisher 2006-2009*  
Christopher M. Mayer *Publisher 2009-2014*  
Laurence L. Winship *Editor 1955-1965*  
Thomas Winship *Editor 1965-1984*

### CHRISTOPHER WEYANT

