

# Media Release

## Town of Gander

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### **Town of Gander disappointed in Town of Grand Falls-Windsor's support for reduction in obstetric services in Central NL**

*(Gander, NL – February 13, 2023)*

The Town of Gander is disappointed and concerned with the position taken by the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor with respect to the delivery of obstetric services in Central NL.

In a statement released on January 27<sup>th</sup>, the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor wrote, “following the Health Accord’s recommendation for the Central Newfoundland Regional Health Centre (CNRHC) to be the sole obstetrics site will ensure a better and safer environment for patients and healthcare providers.”

The Town of Gander believes advocating for a single site for obstetric services in the entire region, ignores geographic and population distribution realities that directly impact health risk.

The Town of Gander is firm that obstetrical services must remain at both James Paton Memorial Regional Health Centre (JPMRHC) in Gander and CNRHC in Grand Falls-Windsor.

The Town of Gander is using statistics and facts to support its argument for obstetric services to be maintained in Gander.

These include:

- population growth - from 2001 to 2021, Gander’s population increased by 23.1%. The Town affirms that recruitment and retention issues are not a reflection of Gander being an undesirable place to live, but a reflection of Central Health as an employer. They are also not unique to Gander.
- the central location of JPMRHC between two major healthcare centers - JPMRHC is perfectly centered between the Health Sciences Centre in St. John’s (334km) and the Western Memorial Health Centre (357km);
- accessibility in the region - 67.4% of the regional population lives within 100km of JPMRHC; and
- access to air ambulance - available through Gander International Airport for neo-natal transport and emergency transport.

The Town of Gander worries for the safety of women and babies who would be required to travel far and unsafe distances to access a birthing place such as those of New-Wes-Valley area, who would drive up to 3 hours in harsh winter conditions. The Town of Gander firmly believes lives will be lost if this recommendation is accepted.

The Town of Grand Falls-Windsor stated, “Historically and currently, birth numbers have been split 60 percent on the west side of the region and 40 percent on the east side of the region.” This is partial and misleading data as the reason there have been more births on the west side is due to the Gander location being on diversion throughout recent years to support the Grand Falls-Windsor location.

In their statement, the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor emphasized the stability of their obstetrics service in saying, “The Coalition believes this stability will be maintained long-term based on conversations with current specialists who call Grand Falls-Windsor home.”

The Town of Gander is firm that service delivery decisions should not be based solely on current staff and where they reside, particularly when those staff may have a pecuniary interest in the issue. The decision should be made based on factors such as population trends, geographic considerations and demographic trends.

“Obstetric services have been sustained in Gander for over 80 years. There is no record of diversion or interruption of that service until 2008, three years after the central east and west health boards were merged and headquartered in Grand Falls -Windsor. Evidence regarding Central Health’s recruitment practices and organizational behaviour, including bullying and harassment of Gander-based medical professionals, may provide insight into reasons for challenges in Gander, specifically since that amalgamation. These issues were among those referenced by Dr. Peter Vaughn in his independent review of governance and management practices at Central Health.” – **Mayor Percy Farwell**

Since 2008, diversions in both directions have been necessary as a result of staffing challenges at each site. Both sites have experienced challenges however travel nurses have been hired to support only the Grand Falls-Windsor site and medical staff based in Gander have been mandated to travel to Grand Falls-Windsor to fill vacancies.

“We were extremely disappointed to read the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor’s position on the potential elimination of obstetric services in Gander. The Town of Gander has always advocated for obstetric services to remain in both Gander and Grand Falls-Windsor. Obstetric service delivery from one site is unacceptable and unsafe. Those responsible for reimagining our health care system must devote their energies to finding solutions to HR challenges, not concede to these challenges by eliminating core services to growing populations.” – **Mayor Percy Farwell**

The Town would prefer to work with the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor to advocate together for equitable reproductive health services for all women and babies of Central Newfoundland.

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