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FOR

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**As Rural Virginia Faces a Maternity Care Crisis, Virginia Interfaith Center
Launches Campaign to Support Midwifery Care in Southwest Virginia**
Campaign kicks off during National Midwifery Week, Oct. 4-10, 2026

RICHMOND, Va. — Virginia is facing a crisis in maternity and obstetric care: **Two-thirds of Virginia counties (63.9%) are maternity care deserts** — counties with no hospitals or birth centers offering obstetric care and no obstetric clinicians. In rural counties, that number rises to 84.8%, according to a 2026 [March of Dimes report](#).

To address this crisis, the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) has launched a community education campaign to increase awareness of the midwifery model of care across Southwest Virginia, addressing its history, the realities of maternity care access, and the ways collaborative maternity care helps families thrive. The campaign includes events, story collecting, and networking efforts across the region.

The campaign aims to improve health outcomes for mothers and infants. VICPP's **new [educational website, \[midwiferyswva.org\]\(http://midwiferyswva.org\)](#)**, is central to that goal, offering information about midwifery care, pregnancy and postpartum care, and other resources. The site also collects Southwest Virginia midwifery stories that reveal the region's rich history of community-based midwifery care.

The RMOMS grant covers 16 counties: Franklin, Patrick, Henry, Carroll, Grayson, Wythe, Bland, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Russell, Buchanan, Dickenson, Wise, Scott, and Lee; and the cities of Martinsville and Norton.

Oct. 4-10 is National Midwifery Week, which honors midwives and midwife-led care. A midwife is a trained health professional who cares for women during pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period, collaborating with or transferring to a doctor when additional medical care is needed. While many

midwives focus on the childbearing years, some provide health care for women from puberty to beyond menopause. Midwives can also provide newborn care in the first 4 weeks.

VICPP's campaign is funded by a grant awarded to the [Virginia Rural Health Association](#) from the [Rural Maternity and Obstetrics Management Strategies \(RMOMS\)](#) program, a federal initiative administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to expand access to maternal and obstetric care in rural communities. As a member of the RMOMS network, VICPP educates community partners about midwifery and doula services and how they complement existing maternal care.

Long before today's health care system existed, midwives cared for families across Southwest Virginia. For generations, community midwives — Appalachian granny midwives, Indigenous midwives, and traditional Black midwives — delivered babies and supported families with care rooted in relationships, experience, and deeply held knowledge.

The Rev. Dr. Marvin Warner, president of the Danville Ministerial Alliance, was born at home with the help of a prominent local Black midwife and is a strong advocate for midwifery care. He said births assisted by midwives are “more than just a birthing event. It is tied to legacy. It is tied to our community. It is tied to the perpetuation of your particular culture.”

Kathryn Haines, VICPP's director of policy and the mother of four — three of whom were born at home with a midwife — said, “Most community members from Southwest Virginia likely had a sibling, a parent or a grandparent born at home with a midwife or a family doctor. By remembering this history, Virginians will be better equipped to expand access to the kind of care that once delivered excellent outcomes.”

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SOURCES

midwiferyswva.org - VICPP's educational website

[March of Dimes](#) – maternity care deserts

[Virginia Department of Health](#) - maternal mortality rate in Virginia by region

[Virginia Neonatal Perinatal Collaborative](#) - access to maternal health care in Virginia

About Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy. *VICPP engages people of faith and goodwill to advocate economic, racial and social justice in Virginia's policies and practices through education, prayer and action. VICPP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit coalition of more than 950 faith communities working toward a more just society.*