From: [redacted]
To: Reproductive, Maternal and Paediatric
Subject: Select committee on reproductive, maternal, and paediatric health services in Tasmania
Date: Tuesday, 17 September 2024 11:27:46 AM

[redacted]

Dear Secretary,

I am writing to the Select Committee on Reproductive, Maternal and Paediatric Health Services in Tasmania, because I need to share my story.

My name is [redacted] I live in the greater Launceston area. I have one child, and they are 6 months old. I am an experienced and passionate teacher who specialises in trauma-informed environments.

I would like to address the trauma and disrespectful care that I experienced during my pregnancy, birth, and post-partum care here in Tasmania.

Pre birth care

- Given "diagnosis" of Gestational Diabetes because they couldn't accurately diagnose me because I had daily morning sickness and Crohn's disease I couldn't tolerate the glucose test so I had a monitor put on my arm. I was and only ate once a day and my BSL would spike when eating because it was the only food entering my body. I have taught a student with T1D before so know a bit about it. I was concerned about the amount of times my BSL dropped to a very low level. This was never addressed despite being relevant to my general wellbeing and obviously reflected my general poor health. My levels never went higher than 8. No one knew what to do so they said to me it would be safer to treat me as if I had GD. I was then told that I should inject myself with insulin before I eat, just incase it rises. I asked if I could do it after I eat due to my vomiting, food aversions, quick loss of appetite, etc and I was concerned that if I injected insulin then couldn't eat what I planned or vomited it up, that I would have a hypo. They didn't see this as a concern. I was told to go to a GD class. I said I didn't feel comfortable and they agreed that the information would not be relevant to my situation, so a nutritionist and a diabetes nurse both came into see me. They said they'd book a 1:1 session and had to for some reason that I cannot recall. I arrived and it was a group class. I asked them to reschedule and they did the same thing. I then got shamed at future appointments at the Women's plus clinic for not caring about my baby and "avoiding" attending. I was promised I was going to a 1:1 session a third time. I turned up and it was a group class. It covered the same information I already had, gave out the blood glucose readers which I already had, and was completely irrelevant to my scenario which made me wonder why I was there.
- I was asked multiple times by doctors & nurses if I had hyperemesis

gravidarum, and I still don’t know, some nurses said I must have it, but others said I didn’t
- I was told at every appointment that I should not be in the high risk clinic coz I had makeup on so obviously was fine
- I was highly concerned that my vomiting and limited capacity to absorb nutrients would affect my baby, this was dismissed due to his large size.
- I went to the PAC a few times; once I was highly dehydrated from vomiting. I heard a nurse say “did she actually vomit this time, did you check the bag?” to a nurse holding a bag of my vomit; I was also told a few times that I went in to PAC because I was “lonely” and were surprised that I then wanted to go home
- I was accused of being lonely, isolated, etc because I never took anyone to my appointments and would continually prove about the nature of my relationship with my babies father but would not actually offer any real support or care for things I mentioned that was actually affecting my mental health, such as my sisters stage 4 cancer and my mothers unstable mental health
- Due to them believing I was lonely and unsupported, which was continually negated by me, I was pressured to take up an offer to have a midwifery student support my pregnancy. I did not want this but was worn down eventually to agree due to the continued “lonely” accusations annoying me. She was lovely. But was an added stress and I also didn’t want a random person following along my personal pregnancy.
- I had an important note on my file to not give my mother information about me if she asked them for it; when in PAC my mother rang the hospital to see if I was there & the person who answered in the birthing suite came right up to my bed with the phone at their ear and asked me if I wanted to talk to her, knowing she would be able to hear me answer and then obviously know I was there.
- Every time you go they ask you to confirm your address, I moved house when I was 7 months pregnant and they entered my address as number [redacted] rather than [redacted]. They never changed it despite me confirming my address each time.
- They were all concerned I was a risk for antenatal depression, despite me stating that I had many good supports around me and that I was excited for the baby despite it being a shock, and insinuated very overtly that I was mentally unwell. One such time I had an ultrasound at my Women’s + appointment and the doctor who did the ultrasound kept saying “He’s cute, don’t you think he’s cute?” over and over - obviously indicating he thought I had some attachment issue with my baby.
- I was never asked about my miscarriage from a year previously, and never offered any genuine comfort or support around convincing me that this pregnancy would not end in a miscarriage too
- During a routine postnatal depression assessment, I was sick of being asked if I had supports around me and if I was lonely etc that I was apparently not good at hiding my apathy in my answers. This wasn’t clear to any doctors or midwives, but my midwife student who was following my journey asked me afterwards if I was actually okay because I didn’t sound like I was. And agreed that the dr didn’t listen to my answers and was just ticking boxes on the computer.

- I had many questions about Crohn's and pregnancy. I was told to ask my gastroenterologist. I went to see him ($160 out of pocket) to ask my questions. He told me he couldn't answer them because the medical hierarchy of support has pregnancies above anything meaning they are meant to be educated enough to support me and that my questions were all more pregnancy-based, than gastroenterological. I was also told by a midwife that it was my job to teach them about crohns and how that alters my requirements and experiences.
- My very first appointment was 2.5 hrs late, on a hot hot day, on a day where I had spewed all morning. In a day before I was moving out of a classroom (big job) and had very limited time to do it, and limited people to help during the time I had. I was stressed about having enough time to move everything and waiting for my first ever obstetrician appointment. I go in and he was interviewing me and asking very closed, seemingly irrelevant questions. I didn't answer them either enough pep. He wrote a note on my file that I saw very clearly on the big double screen computer when he turned around to get printing, the note said "[redacted] has flat affect and is difficult to engage with." Firstly my name is [redacted] secondly nothing flattens an affect more than reading that note about yourself.
- That note is very ironic as they hardly added anything to my file. Each appointment saw me re-explaining things. They would ask me why I had been prescribed aspirin (I don't know) and why I stopped it. This was asked every appointment til I gave birth. My iron infusion was not documented. My presentations with cervix bleeding were not documented. My GD situation was not documented. But at least everyone knew I had flat affect. Since I've given birth I was denied a medication that was needed due to having GD, until I explained the situation to the dr who said that diagnosis sounded ridiculous. My GP said that my file was essentially empty and assumed I had a problem-free pregnancy and then I had to quickly update him on what happened/why/when/etc. He almost couldn't give me a medication because he thought I had GD.
- The midwives were highly judgemental and oppositional about supporting my desire to have a c-section. One midwife said I was taking the easy way out. I told them why I didn't want to risk getting any tears or infections from the birth because my gastroenterologist (who they directed me to seek out help from) told me people often flare badly post birth. I told these midwives I was concerned about having chronic diarrhoea, a newborn, "no support" according to them, and a perineal tear - I thought it sounded like an infection waiting to happen. I wax also concerned that my friable cervix would haemorrhage or be an issue during a natural birth. All of the midwives and obstetricians gave robotic responses about the risks of those things being low, and not considering that the risks are 0 if I have a c section. They continually unhelpfully reminded me in a condescending fashion that c sections are a major surgery and that I'd be rendered useless for months. And didn't seem to think that a hemicolectomy was a comparable experience (much worse hemicolectomy recovery than a c-section)
- Highly judgmental when i said I didn't want anyone else in the birthing suite

with me. Eventually asked my brother who is a Dr fly down to come in due to my increasing lack of trust in their ability to deliver my baby healthily based on these lackadaisical and ignorant interactions.

- Forced birth support person on me due to "lack of support"
- I presented to PAC after bleeding and was told I needed a colposcopy. At the start of my pregnancy, my GP had rung me to ask if I was okay with my file publicly stating that I was a SA and DV survivor. I had an obstetrician insert their involved fingers into my vagina without warning. I was offered laughing gas prior to the appointment, but in the day they decided to "wait & see how I go". It didn't go well and they couldn't complete the procedure due to my level of discomfort and inability to use the laughing gas as I was inconsolably by that point. I have never found out the results. One dr told me to forget about it, not to worry and it would be sorted out after I'd given birth. I was told I needed a follow up colposcopy as soon as safe after birth. I was told I had one booked at 6 weeks pp. 6 weeks came and went. I rang up the women's clinic. They were rude and said I couldn't just book one and that I needed to be referred. My gp wrote a letter to them and I got a letter with an appointment in the mail a few months later. It was was a Monday 8.30 appointment. The day before my period returned for the first time since I gave birth. There was so much blood I felt so faint and fevery that I went to ED that night. They said my iron was low but not low enough to be an emergency. So I left. I was told that I couldn't have a colposcopy with a period so I needed to cancel. I tried to contact the clinic early on Monday. The switchboard guy said no one is there til 8.30 and I rang 4 times so long that the phone call cut off after 15 minute intervals. I rang back around 11 and [redacted] answered who was very offended that I'd not let them know Friday (I didn't get my period til Sunday arvo) and that a doctor would decide if I got another appointment but it was unlikely because I didn't show up. I got a letter in the mail for an appointment in a few months for another Monday appointment. But at 9am appointment this time. If my appointment was at 6 weeks pp, when it was meant to be, then I wouldn't have had this issue.
- I asked a question about formula, just in case and a midwife said "oh aren't you even going to try to breastfeed" in voice of snooty and judgmental teenager
- I asked a question during an appointment and a nurse called [redacted] started to explain then rolled her eyes and said "you don't even care anyway" and never answered
- No continuity of care despite high risk pregnancy. I still dont understand the logic. I literally never saw the same midwife or obstetrician twice, except in PAC occasionally. In my first appointment I was told I'd have a team of people I am familiar with who would be in the birthing suite with me. Literally knew no one. I asked to have my bloods tested regularly and they said I looked fine so didn't need to. When GD debacle happened, they stopped my obstetrician appointments and made me see a GD nurse, who even said she had nothing she needed to see me for. I was classed as high risk but treated as low risk, low intellect, low importance. I had to continually explain to doctors why I was considered high risk. I wondered what purpose my file is meant to serve. Why

was it put on me to educate staff about why I'm high risk?

- Had iron checked after I begged for a test. It was low. I was told to take iron tablets. I told them I can't because I can't absorb the tablet, and they are also well known to exasperate Crohn's symptoms in a flare (which I was in by this point) - the dr told me to "see how they go" - none of this was in my notes do the next week I asked again and the dr organised a iron infusion.
- I reported extreme carpal tunnel/dequervain pain. Asked if they could do b12 injection that I had with me to rule out nerve damage - it was low because it was overdue. The nurse at my dr surgery was meant to administer it but I had to keep cancelling appointments due to morning sickness. I asked if they'd do my b12 injection quickly in the appt at womens + but told no because it wasn't relevant to my pregnancy. They had nothing to offer to help my arm pain. They suggested to try hot or cold packs, they weren't sure which would help.
- I requested to see an obstetrician after an appointment was incorrectly cancelled by reception. I had been to see the endocrinologist who had nothing to help me with. I was told I could see an obstetrician but it was unfair to ask because there were so many people in the waiting room there waiting to get seen too.
- Was told my baby was in the highest weight percentile and I was blamed and told I was being selfish because they decided it was related to GD. They said my baby would come out all floppy and weak and have lots of problems.
- Was given aspirin to mitigate concerns about my baby being small. Got daily nose bleeds so stopped. Every appointment they thought I was taking aspirin and would ask me to explain why I was taking it and why I hadn't stopped.
- Continually had to remind them about tests, my medical history, etc
- Told me to see gastroenterologist coz they can't be expected to know about that too
- Put on gd care circuit and missed out on antenatal care appointments -had list of antenatal information from 1st appointment at clinic and only a quarter of the stuff had been vaguely covered.
- Told them regularly that I was not eating or not able to eat much/enough but no one addressed it or offered any help aside from "just eat more if you're worried the baby isn't getting enough"
- I was concerned throughout the entire pregnancy that I would miscarry due to a past miscarriage. No support, information, etc was ever given to comfort me or convince me otherwise
- I asked to see the social worker and sent a huge list of questions through, she came out to the waiting room and said the nurses would answer them. The nurses couldn't and they were never answered.

During birth stay

- Informed staff I had a raw fruit/vege allergy (oral allergy syndrome)- in hospital I proceeded to get literal fruit added on my plate, steamed fruit every single day , salad, when I wouldn't eat anything the staff gave me filthy looks. One nurse, [redacted] helped me and did a report on the kitchen staff for not listening to my allergy needs. Nothing changed…- kitchen staff would override meal options I chose, for meals with things I couldn't eat.

- I still to this day don't know what happened to my baby for 20 minutes when a team came down to help resuscitate him. Everyone said he was fine but he obviously wasn't.
- Huge pressure to breastfeed milk that would never have been there, as c section was a week before due date, and milk obviously comes after baby is born. Everyone tells you milk comes in 4-5 days later. Despite this, the nurses and midwives would painfully milk me, in a very forceful way. I asked them to stop and they said they'd do it for a little bit longer. I asked if they could give my baby formula and they said they'd keep doing what they were doing. They broke me up to get minuscule amounts. Then made a fuss when my baby lost heaps of weight. My milk came in at 4 days, and had no issues. I was discharged by then and I think that was part of why it came, the stress they were causing both physically and physiologically was probably disrupting it. When I asked if I could give my baby formula because I was feeling really unwell, I was told I needed to breastfeed and i was letting my baby down. And scared into believing them that his weight loss was my fault when they refused to give him formula.
- I had ondansetron wafers. I was told hospital only had tablets. One nurse told me I could self prescribe them as long as I let them know afterwards. On the 1st night they were out of reach. I asked a nurse to grab them as I was in pain. She refused to get them and went to get the non-wafer ones. I told her I'd be sick, she didn't listen. I vomited. Then couldn't take pain relief without vomiting. They wouldn't put an IV with pain relief in as I "had to get used to being on whatever pain relief I'd have at home" I continued to not get antinausea or pain relief. A team of pain relief doctors came down and decided to give me morphine. They injected me and I felt so sick afterwards. No pain but so woozy. This was when i requested formula the first time, I felt it was unsafe to hold my baby. My brother who is a dr came to see me. He was alarmed at my state. He read my chart and said they gave way more morphine than they should have and it should've been given over 2 doses.
- As the day went on, I was still feeling shit, and I noticed my baby was changing. He was not as alert. He was sleeping constantly. I had to force feed him and wake him up to feed. He was floppy, almost non-responsive, and crying more. A few nurses said he's a normal baby and he's okay. A few said it was because of my adhd medication I took during my pregnancy (that I was told were safe). But stimulant medication wouldn't have made a baby lethargic anyway. I was accused of being a drug addict by many groups of people. One nurse admitted she thought my baby seemed off. A paediatric team came to assess him and said he was fine but fast heart rate. He was getting more floppy. I was getting upset that no one was listening and that no one was helping me. I said I was scared he had brain damage from being without oxygen at birth. The nurse said my baby might have cerebral palsy but we'd only know in a year. My brother heard I was upset and came in. He instantly knew from looking at my chart again that my baby's symptoms match a baby who's had too much

morphine. I was so angry that they didn't tell me this could happen. So I demanded to leave. I had a nicely midwife called [redacted] who helped discharge me. This was Saturday night, my baby was born on the Thursday morning.

- No one from the LGH ever realised why he was floppy. It took a week for him to return to how he was in his first 24 hrs of life. I was a distraught first time /single mother, apparently without support (according to them) who had been crying all arvo and expressing concern about her floppy baby, I demanded to be discharged out of the blue and literally no one from the LGH ever asked how we were, or if it was safe for us to leave. They didn't ask why. Or touch base afterwards at all. Lots of red flag behaviour for PND but staff literally could not have cared any less.
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After birth

- Child health nurse - told me my baby's fontanel was tiny, that his brain wouldn't fit in his skull and that he'd be deformed and have brain damage as well as being blind/deaf but "dont worry" about it coz we will just wait and see how it goes in 6 months time. I had a question from my gp about my baby's foreskin- and the CHN said: "I don't have a penis so I don't know."
- Surprised that there's no support at all. I felt so abandoned and overwhelmed. I had no idea what to do, or where I could go. I was so disgusted by the lack of professionalism and lacking basic competency that I never want to set foot in the LGH again. And I would find it very hard to trust their judgement.
- I was told throughout my pregnancy that I had no social support (they never listened) when I asked for people to come in to visit me, they were inflexible with the visiting hours. It is obvious that their mental health and PND checks are all fake.
- I was starving and had nothing suitable to eat . No wonder the milk wasn't coming.
- The LGH staff completely ruined what should've been the most magical of experiences

SOLUTIONS

The recommendations that I have are:

- Easier and wider access to midwife led continuity of care models
- Access to a known midwife
- Access to publicly funded homebirth, birth centre or a birthing on country program
- Access to unbiased, evidence-based information
- Legislation on informed consent
- Mandatory trauma-informed training for clinicians and training for clinicians to do their job
- More funding for post-partum care, such as physio, social worker, lactation support
- Improved support for early pregnancy loss

Please make contact if you have any clarifying questions.
Kind regards,
[redacted]