

## City gives hospital 'baby hatch' OK

KUMAMOTO (Kyodo) Kumamoto Mayor Seishi Koyama announced Thursday that the city will allow a local hospital to set up Japan's first "baby hatch," a receptacle that allows infants whose parents cannot care for them to be dropped off anonymously.

Jikei Hospital has said it plans to begin installing the hatch once it receives city permission and to have it working by year's end to save babies who would otherwise be abandoned or left to die.

Baby hatches are common in Europe, most notably Germany, where they are called "babyklappe" (baby hatches) or "babyfenster" (baby windows). However, the hospital's plan stirred up controversy and opposition from people who argued it might encourage parents to abandon their babies.

The hospital asked the Kumamoto public health center for permission to install the baby hatch, part of its reform plan, in December.

City officials said the legal aspects of the baby hatch, including Article 218 of the Penal Code, which imposes penalties on those who neglect to perform their duties to protect the elderly, infants, and disabled or sick people, had been studied.

The city also consulted the central government, but no legal obstacles were found, they said.

Jikei Hospital said the baby hatch, to be called the "konotori no yurikago" (stork cradle), will take the form of a box that is accessible from outside via a window. The box will be equipped with the same interior conditions as an incubator.

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