

Dear Senators,

As a mother fortunate enough to have had the wonderful, irreplaceable experience of birthing at home, I am appalled to hear of the current process for dealing with complaints against midwives and the implications for independent homebirth midwives.

That conditions should automatically and immediately be placed on independent homebirth midwives forbidding them to practice their craft and assist women birth at home, simply because a complaint is lodged against them is ludicrous. A complaint is not a ruling, it is the possibility of the need for a ruling. This should not be sufficient cause for banning the practitioner from working, which is what the condition amounts to.

Looking into a complaint is not always a timely process so this can mean an independent homebirth midwife can be prohibited from working for a lengthy period of time, just because of a single complaint. This is an unfair system with punishment handed out regardless of the severity of the case and before any judgement has been made. Surely such a system would deter hospital staff from raising complaints if they understood the severe implications of lodging one, which would not be in the interest of safety or accountability.

It is not a sensible process, where an effective ban is the interim response to any complaint. This deals out significantly harsher treatment to independent midwives than midwives employed as hospital staff, and the consequence of being required to practice within a hospital setting spells an end to their work. This form of discrimination of independent midwives is not justifiable.

Such a set up exposes pregnant women who have sought the assistance of an independent homebirth midwife to the risk of being without care at a crucial time. Were a pregnant woman to be left without their independent homebirth midwife, who was prohibited from practicing as a complaint was looked in to, this would cause substantial stress and interfere with her chances of having a trauma-free birth. Some women refuse to birth in hospital settings due to extremely traumatic experiences during previous births. I have heard first hand accounts of hospital births where the notion of informed consent was absolutely absent and respect of patient wishes was not shown and indeed negative outcomes were the result of the interventionist approach practiced. Women need to have the option of homebirth, for the safe and secure method of birthing it offers. The art of homebirth should not be treated with the degree of caution and regulation which it currently is. The statistics bear out the safeness of this method of birth. The current complaint process is one such example of where the practice of independent homebirth midwives is unfairly interfered with without cause.

Birthing at home was particularly significant for me as a mother of Aboriginal children. There were practices to be followed to honour my children's cultural heritage that could not have been performed appropriately in a hospital setting. It is especially critical that the right of Aboriginal women to birth at home and on country is protected.

There must be a better way to deal with complaints lodged against independent homebirth midwives that delivers them equivalent treatment to that delivered to midwives in hospitals. There must be a better way to deal with complaints that does not unnecessarily leave pregnant women without their organised choice of care midway through their pregnancy.

Thankyou for your time in considering my submission.

With kind regards,  
Zoe Gordon