We write on our behalf and that of our family and ask the Senate Committee find that the Commonwealth of Australia indemnify private midwives in order for them to legally practice homebirths in Australia. If midwives are unable to obtain indemnity insurance they are then unable to register to practice and cannot legally practice.

Australian women and their families deserve the right to choose where and with whom they birth. Homebirth has been shown to be as safe or safer than hospital births and should be an accessible option for all Australian women. Homebirth programs run from local hospitals maintain restrictive criteria which prevent many women from accessing them, further, they are available to women in only a few select geographical areas. We live in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney, and are unable to access such a program. In addition there are no freestanding birth centres available in our area, and the non-functioning status of the maternity facilities at Katoomba Hospital means we do not have the option of midwife-led care in a small, local public hospital.

Continuity of care is important to many women in pregnancy and birth and this is provided by homebirth midwives. After two traumatic hospital births with a private obstetrician we have chosen homebirth for our third child. The care provided by our private midwife is second to none, and should be available to all women. If the Commonwealth Government is unable to fund private homebirth and refuses to provide indemnity insurance as is available to other medical practitioners it is in contravention of the United Nations Statement on the Rights of Women (1995) which states that "Women have the right to have control over, and decide freely and responsibly on all matters relating to their sexual and reproductive health". The marginalisation of homebirth must not continue. For women who do not want to birth in hospital homebirth must be made a legitimate choice. Private midwives must be freely available to those who want them.

Regards

Elizabeth and Sean Howells