

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related bills

I am a mother of an extremely healthy 2 year old that was born at home. I am a mature age mother giving birth to my first baby at the age of 37. For me the birth of my child the environment she came into and who was present during this sacred event were of the utmost importance and I know this to be true for all mothers everywhere, this was the first experience of her life outside the safety and comfort of the womb and I strongly believe that this should be a peaceful, pleasant and safe experience for both baby and mother. Statistics on birthing around the world show that most babies are born at home without any medical intervention and most of these births progress normally and without complications. By contrast in the Western world it is a shame that we fear such a natural and normal process, Australia currently has the highest rate of caesarean births an alarmingly high percentage per capita and an exceedingly high rate of medical intervention which when put into perspective on the world scale cannot be justified. Studies around the world show that birth is more likely proceeds normally and naturally in a peaceful non threatening environment for the mother and when she has a close and trusting relationship with those in attendance. birth. I know for me this was extremely important and I could not imagine having a birth in a foreign environment with medical staff that I had not had the opportunity to build a meaningful and intimate rapport with as I did with my homebirth midwife. My midwife provided the highest level of care and allowed me to feel like I was in control of all of the details surrounding the birth as well as how the birth itself was approached. I felt respected as a person and as a birthing woman, I felt incredibly safe and knew that at any stage if I required medical help she would have transferred me to the nearest hospital with birthing facilities and been there by my side as an advocate for my choices and rights and as an important and trusted support. The birth was the most incredible experience of my life and it went well without the need for transferral to a hospital despite the fact my baby was posterior and in a hospital situation this almost always results in intervention. I want other Australian women to be able to access the same exceptional care I benefitted from.

I am concerned at the *Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009*, the *Midwives Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009* and the *Midwives Professional Indemnity (Runoff Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009*, which are currently the subject of an Inquiry by the Committee on Community Affairs.

The bills expand the role of midwives in the provision of maternity services, but exclude midwives who attend births at home. By excluding these midwives, the Government is effectively making attended homebirth illegal. This is because, under the proposed National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, due to be implemented in July 2010, any midwife who cannot obtain insurance cannot be registered. Laws in many states make it a criminal act for an unregistered midwife to attend a birth, and the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme also imposes a fine for doing so.

If enacted, rules made under the bills before the Parliament will make it illegal for a qualified midwife to attend a homebirth in Australia. Such a move is dangerous for mothers and babies, bucks international trends in maternity care, and is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care.

With extremely high intervention rates in hospital, many women are afraid to birth in hospitals and believe their only chance at natural childbirth is at home. If it becomes illegal for registered, highly skilled midwives to care for these women, many will feel they have no option other than to birth unattended. This legislation unintentionally promotes this practice, which is directly contrary to the World Health Organization's objective of having a skilled attendant at every birth. I am extremely concerned that the legislation will result in unnecessary deaths of babies and mothers, and may also result in midwives being fined and jailed if they assist labouring women. This is an absurd situation in a modern democracy.

In the UK, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands, homebirth is publicly funded and supported. I am not aware of another country in the world where a midwife can be jailed for attending a homebirth.

Australian women must all be entitled to the same Medicare support wherever they give birth, and midwives must all be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work.

Yours sincerely
Felicity White

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I am a mother of an extremely healthy, happy and bright 2 year old that was born at home. I am a mature age mother giving birth to my first baby at the age of 37. For me the birth of my child the environment she came into and who was present during this sacred event were of the utmost importance and I know this to be true for mothers everywhere.

I strongly believe that the first experience of a baby's life outside the safety and comfort of the womb should be a peaceful, pleasant and safe experience for both baby and mother.

Statistics on birthing around the world show that most babies are born at home without any medical intervention and most of these births progress normally and without complications. By contrast in the Western world it is a shame that we fear such a natural and normal process. Australia currently has the highest rate of caesarean births, an alarmingly high percentage per capita and an exceedingly high rate of medical intervention which when put into perspective on the world scale cannot be justified. Studies around the world have shown that birth is more likely proceeds normally and naturally in a peaceful non threatening environment for the mother and when she has a close and trusting relationship with those in attendance at the birth. I know that for me this was extremely important and I could not imagine giving birth in a foreign environment with medical staff that I had not had the opportunity to build a meaningful and intimate relationship with, as I did with my homebirth midwife. My midwife provided the highest level of care and allowed me to feel like I was in control of all of the details surrounding the birth as well as how the birth itself was approached. I felt respected both as a person and as a birthing woman. I felt incredibly safe and knew that at any stage if I required medical help she would have transferred me to the nearest hospital with birthing facilities and been there by my side as an advocate for my choices and rights and as an important and trusted support person.

The birth was the most incredible experience of my life and it went well without the need for transferral to a hospital despite the fact my baby was delivered posteriorly and in a hospital situation this almost always results in intervention quite often a c-section.

Not only did having my own private homebirth midwife allow me to birth in the comfort and privacy of my own home, it allowed me to have all my prenatal checkups and post natal care there as well. Post natal care at home allows you and your baby to adjust to the overwhelming change that birth is and to introduce your baby slowly and gently to the world. I want other Australian women to be able to access the same exceptional care I benefited from and to have a greater choice for pre, peri and post natal care.

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If enacted, rules made under the bills before the Parliament will make it illegal for a qualified midwife to attend a homebirth in Australia. Such a move is dangerous for mothers and babies, bucks international trends in maternity care, and is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care.

With extremely high intervention rates in hospital, many women are afraid to birth in hospitals and believe their only chance at natural childbirth is at home. If it becomes illegal for registered, highly skilled midwives to care for these women, many will feel they have no option other than to birth unattended. This legislation unintentionally promotes this practice, which is directly contrary to the World Health Organization's objective of having a skilled attendant at every birth. The implications of passing laws such as these are far reaching I am extremely concerned that the legislation will result in unnecessary deaths of babies and mothers, and may also result in midwives being fined and jailed if they assist labouring women. This is an absurd situation in a modern democracy, laws such as these are draconian if not completely outrageous.

In the UK, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands, homebirth is publicly funded and supported. I am not aware of another country in the world where a midwife can be jailed for attending a homebirth. Australian midwives must all be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work.

I also strongly believe that the Government has a responsibility to support women in their choices around birth and the care of the pregnant and post natal mother. Government subsidisation of private midwifery care would make this invaluable service available to all women as it should be a freely available option not a privilege Australian women must all be entitled to the same Medicare support wherever they choose to give birth.

Yours sincerely
Felicity White