

Polly Christie

## Response to proposed Midwifery Legislation

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## Impact Statement

My beautiful healthy baby girl was born naturally at home last year. I had the most superb, unwavering pre and post natal care by an independent midwife. I was able to establish breastfeeding successfully and have not had any health issues myself, and nor has my baby, since giving birth one year ago.

If my partner and I decide to have more children and the pregnancy and labor is going well, I feel my most likely option is to birth with or without a midwife in my own home. My own daughter will grow up knowing how successful and calm her birth was and so she too could very well want a natural home birth for her own children. What will I tell her? How can I tell her that women's right to choose a home birth was changed in 2010?

I live in a community that supports many independent midwives and home births. It is an informed decision that me and many of my friends make. As much of the research suggests that many women have fewer complications during labor if they have continued care and feel safe during labor, I suspect that many of the women in my community will still make the choice to birth at home but without a "legal" midwife.

A trained independent midwife monitors both mother and baby prior to the labor. This ensures that the women are in a fit and healthy state to birth at home. If complications arise during the labor, the women can attend a hospital where the necessary expertise is available. If however, women go "underground" in order to have a home birth, they are vulnerable as complications could go unrecognized until the labor. This is a serious concern. Women have the right to birth in the familiarity and comfort of their own homes, and they have the right to have professional care to ensure they are informed of their health and safety. Their rights and safety are undermined and violated by this new proposed legislation.

If I become pregnant again and wish to have a home birth, how will I access pre natal care? Will I have to lie to my GP and also register at a hospital knowing fully well that I would not attend the hospital to birth my baby? Many babies are born on the side of a road in a car on the way to hospital; surely being in a warm clean home is far safer, so as I live in rural area I would rather stay in my warm clean home.

If I had a midwife attend my birth with the new regulations I would be forced to keep it silent. I personally find it too difficult to comprehend that a trained midwife attending a birth in someone's home would be illegal. Women have been trained and helping other women birth for centuries. Morally I would not be able to "dob" her in, how could the care of one women to another during such an amazing necessary time be "criminal"?

This proposed legislation will impact on me, my community and the health and well being of all women and babies in our country. We need options for all women, for those that feel safer in hospital and those that feel safer in their homes.

I want the freedom to make an informed choice about where and how I birth my baby. This proposed legislation could take away women's rights to choose how she births, and after all it is one of the most significant choices and achievements every woman makes.

The Honourable Nicola Roxon, MP  
Minister for Health and Ageing  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Minister,

I am writing as a concerned citizen regarding the proposed changes to maternity services, legislation for which is about to be presented to Parliament. While I understand that the new legislation seeks to provide benefits for midwives in clinical settings, which will certainly enhance maternity care overall, there is no provision in the new arrangements for independent midwives who care for women at home. In addition, Commonwealth-supported insurance cover for midwives will not extend to independent midwives, which will make them unable to register with the new National Registration Scheme for Health Care Providers. Without registration, independent midwives will be unable to practice, and homebirth will be effectively outlawed.

For a number of reasons, this situation is unacceptable. All women should have the right to decide where and with whom they birth their babies. Homebirth may be a minority choice in this country, but it is still a valid choice. Many women will continue to choose homebirth, often after hospital trauma. This legislation will merely serve to push homebirth 'underground', with all the attendant risks and anxieties that this produces.

The Australian College of Midwives has released a statement in which it expressed its concern that the new legislation will precipitate "a rise in unattended homebirths [which] will only get worse unless the government extends its proposed indemnity scheme to ensure healthy low risk women can continue to choose homebirth with competent networked midwives". If women are denied access to a high standard of midwifery care in their preferred venue, then there will certainly be a greater number of cases of women and babies placed at terrible risk through unattended homebirth.

Homebirth is a safe, evidence-based model of maternity care – it makes no sense to exclude it from the current legislation. Independent midwives provide an outstanding level of quality professional care, which has informed mainstream maternity practice for years. This legislation restricts midwifery practice – against scientific evidence, against the principles of women's informed choice, and against the safety of determined homebirthing women.

Please, in your position as Minister and author of this legislation, seek to amend the legislation before it is written into law. Act bravely by seeking to ensure that homebirth is a safe, indemnified and legal option for women in this country.

Yours sincerely,

***Polly Christie***