

Wednesday 15th July 2009

To whom it may concern,

Re: REGARDING THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION FOR CHANGES TO MATERNITY CARE IN AUSTRALIA –

MY STATEMENT IS AS FOLLOWS:

- **Are you/and your partner still planning to have more children?**

Yes we are still planning to have more children, hopefully one or two more.

- **If not, do you have friends/family who will be affected if homebirth is not an option for them?**

I had my first child in hospital and my second just recently at home with my two beautiful midwives. The effect that this proposed legislation is and will have on my family is taking its toll. The pressure to try and conceive a baby earlier than we had planned so that we can birth with our midwives at home has made life in general very stressful. I have many friends and family members who are starting the process of having children and who wish to have their children at home with midwives. So this is not only affecting me and my family personally, it is also effecting my friendship groups as well.

- **What about your own children's birthing choices?**

My children are very young at the moment, but they already have a very normalised view of birth. Homebirth with a midwife may be something they wish to do when it is time for them to bear children. I would hope that they will have that choice available to them when their time comes.

- **How do you think an absence of homebirth and independent midwifery services might impact on your community?**

Every woman must have the right to choose where and with whom they birth their babies. This should be a basic human right. The effect that this legislation will have on the community is huge. Lets just start on the effect this will have on the mother and baby. A woman must feel safe when she is birthing otherwise her labour may be effected and interventions may be needed. This will affect breastfeeding rates, it will increase rates of postnatal depression, and it could mean more babies die from complications arising from births or surgery. Women will be forced to birth at home without a midwife and that will mean that somewhere down the track a labour will progress from being normal to abnormal and without a midwife there to recognise those signs, a baby or babies will die and so too may the mother. And if that mother wanted to have a midwife present at home with her and it was because the government legislated against that right – then it is the governments fault that baby died. What this government does not understand is that women who birth at home with a midwife take responsibility for themselves, their babies and their birth. But when a basic human right of being able to employ a private midwife at their birth is taken away from them, then the blood rests solely on the government. How will these politicians be able to look at themselves in the mirror when that baby dies knowing that they are responsible for legislating it? If a politician votes in favour of this legislation then they are responsible, they will be responsible for the baby that will inevitably die because a mother could not employ a private midwife to be at her birth with her. I hope you all are listening and really understanding this – you will be responsible, I wonder whether you will be able to live with yourselves for that.

Families will be affected because they will not be able to have as many children as they wished and others may not be able to have children at all. In private maternity care practice, there are two competitors; midwives and obstetricians – yet the government subsidises private indemnity insurance for GPs and obstetricians and not midwives. So who is this legislation supporting, well it certainly isn't benefiting midwives because they will be losing their scope of practice and those midwives who only work in private practice will lose their career and therefore sole income. So the only people this will be benefiting are the pockets of obstetricians because they will then take over all of the private maternity care provision. Interesting isn't it, considering it is the obstetricians who the government appears to have been listening to and NOT the women or the midwives.

If the needs of the woman are put central to this debate, and the woman was allowed to choose their birth care provider and place of birth (and that means homebirth); then the government would not be proposing this legislation. But instead we have a government only listening to the obstetricians who are only qualified to work within the parameters of high risk birth because that is how they are trained. Homebirth has been proven to be safe, but the government isn't looking at any research to show this.

- **Will your local hospital be likely to provide a homebirth program?**

I would suggest that our local hospital service WOULD NOT provide a homebirth service. I am heavily involved at a consumer level within this service and from day one it has been almost impossible to make any changes up there. They currently do have a primary care midwifery program with an enormous waiting list, but they refuse to seek more funding from

the government to expand this model of care for the women who are screaming out for it. The hospital also refuses to allow women to birth in water despite lots of research to prove how safe it is; and given many women who birth at home like to use water for their labours I sincerely doubt they would ever provide this service. I stand to be corrected though.

I do know through my involvement as a consumer within D.H.S that they are looking at government funded community birthing programs ran through hospital services. However there will be a half hour limit to the hospital service for women to be eligible. My question is this, with so many small hospitals in regional and rural Victoria that have closed down over the years and those who have lost birthing services; then what service will be available to these women that live outside of the half an hour if privately practising midwives are not allowed to practice?

- **If you are planning to have more children, will you want to choose homebirth?**

Absolutely yes, without a doubt. After experiencing a homebirth with my fabulous midwives for the birth of my second child, there is absolutely no way that I could birth anywhere else. When I birthed my first child in hospital I had to birth in the way they wanted me to; and **NEVER AGAIN** will I 'sell out' my needs for my birth experience and the needs of my babies. If I want to have a water birth then I am going to have one, if I want to birth standing up then I will; if I want to have a hands off labour then I will; if I want to have a private midwife who honours the birth process as a normal, beautiful experience then I will. I cannot believe that even in a hospital, birthing women cannot employ a private midwife as a midwife because the hospitals will not let them practice as a midwife, only a support person. Seriously I would love to know what private midwives have done to the government to not be able to practice.

- **What will you do after July 2010?**

If I have not been able to get pregnant before the August cut off time, then I will have to choose not to have anymore children. I am not going into hospital to have my babies, they do not allow water birth and I cannot control who will be in my room when I birth. The effect that this will have on my feelings of parenting and the relationship I have with my husband will be enormous, not to mention how I will be feeling at those first moments with my baby. I cannot believe that the government thinks they can decide for me where and with whom I can birth with. Last time I checked, the government didn't own my body or my vagina; but it appears that if this legislation is accepted they will own my body and my vagina. How can any normal person think this is not a violation of my human rights?

- **Do you live a long way from mainstream maternity care?**

I live 25 minutes away from mainstream maternity care.

- **Will you choose to birth with an 'underground' midwife?**

In my area we only have one midwife who practices as a primary independent midwife. So we are already restricted with midwives available to us. If I could find an underground midwife from somewhere else then I most certainly would employ them to be the midwife for the births of my babies.

- **Will your family and friends 'keep quiet' about it?**

We will just have to choose not to tell any friends or family members in order to protect the midwife willing to provide such beautiful care. There is no way I would tell anyone about it, I would just feel so blessed to have a midwife willing to be with me, despite the possible consequences if she does.

- **How will you get info - by word of mouth?**

Luckily I am already quite involved with the birthing world and I hopefully would be able to find this out by the people who trust me. But I feel for those women who wish to birth at home with a midwife and don't know how to find someone.

- **Will you be willing to pay cash?**

Yes I will be willing to pay cash, but I will have to miss out on any rebate from my health care fund like I received for my recent homebirth. This will cause financial difficulties for us.

- **How will you get all the routine tests performed?**

I don't have ultrasounds or other screening tests during my pregnancies, except for my anti-D injections. I will just have to go to my hospital service to get my anti-D injections and I will just be telling them that I am free birthing because they would not provide a homebirth service for me and other women.

- **How will you register the birth?**

I will register the birth by filling in the paperwork and sending it away.

- **Will you have the same level of comfort ability with your midwife?**

I have no doubt that I will still have beautiful care, but I can't begin to imagine how stressed she may be feeling because she is the one risking her career in order to support me at home.

- **What if complications arise during the birth?**

I will transfer to hospital, but in order to protect my midwife I will not be able to take her with me. Even now, before this legislation comes in, even when I could take her with me, they are not allowed to practise as a midwife in the hospital which is absolute craziness.

- **What sorts of concerns would you have about the whole situation?**

I would not be able to have the one person, the one midwife who I trust more than the world will ever know. The beautiful, trusting relationship that develops when you have a midwife with you for all of your care is profound and I cannot find the words to explain this. To then have a complication and not be able to have my midwife beside me helping me through would be devastating and I would imagine would take along time to recover from emotionally.

- **Will you choose to birth at home *without* a trained midwife?**
NO absolutely not. The relationship that builds with my midwife and the confidence I have in her is so important. This trust is especially important if things progress outside of what is normal, because WITHOUT HER I would not know this and I could be putting my baby at risk. So I would have to choose not to have more children.
- **If an independent midwife assists you prenatally, or provides lactation consultancy, or post-birth support, or is mysteriously present during your birth anytime after July 2010, then they could face legal action (if they're caught). What do you think about that?**
This would have to be the most ridiculous idea that any politician had ever come up with. How stupid the government must be to restrict who a woman can choose to care for her throughout her pregnancy, birth and postnatally.
- **If you with-hold information about a midwife who's still practicing unregistered, you could be legally liable. How do you feel about that?**
Again I can't even begin to put into words how ridiculous that is. It should be a basic human right for a woman to choose with whom and where they birth their babies.
- **If you're a doula or birth attendant, will you attend homebirths without a trained midwife present?**
I am a doula and there is no way I could support a woman at home without a midwife present because I am not trained to do this.
- **Will you attend 'underground homebirths', with an illegal and unregistered midwife?**
Yes I would attend underground homebirths with an unregistered midwife provided that I knew the midwife already.
- **Will it change the way you practice?**
Yes because I will not be attending as many homebirths as I do currently. For me attending homebirths is very rewarding because you are witnessing a woman's primal birthing capabilities without any interventions. It is a very powerful experience to be involved in and amazingly rewarding.

IMPACT STATEMENT PROVIDED BY:

Faye Margaret Kricak

DATE: 15th July 2009