

Submission for Senate Committee

As a consumer, health practitioner and student midwife, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this review.

On discovering I was pregnant with our first child, I booked into a local public hospital with the KYM (Know Your Midwife) program. I wanted to have someone I knew with me for the duration of the pregnancy and birth of my child. On further reading, research and after much discussion with my husband, we decided to plan for a homebirth instead, with an independent midwife as my primary carer. To cut a long story short, we never looked back, and I had a wonderful experience birthing our daughter in the comfort and seclusion of our home, without unnecessary interventions.

If I may be brief and to-the-point, I wish for a public system of maternity care more in line with what the World Health Organisation (and evidence) recommends for the care of women ante-, peri- and post-natally. That is, with midwives as primary carers (not Obstetricians), publicly-funded midwife-run birth centres, caseload midwifery (ie known midwife programs), publicly supported homebirth with midwives in attendance, ability for women to claim the cost of using independent midwives on Medicare (including having diagnostics bulk billable when those services would be free if within the hospital system).

In addition to this, I feel it is imperative that private midwives be allowed to continue their practice. As it stands, the legislation will effectively make homebirth with a registered midwife illegal by July 2010. No other health professional is afforded the singular disrespect offered midwives who, upon completing a tertiary level qualification preparing them to practice autonomously, are then expected to only work under the supervision of doctors (namely Obstetricians). Midwives are the experts in normal, Obstetricians are the experts in abnormal. Let's not perpetuate the current problems with the delivery of maternity services in Australia by outlawing the truly-autonomous practice of midwifery.

Having had a homebirth, and having seen a number of births in a professional and student capacity, I would not wish to attend a hospital to birth any future children, unless medically necessary. I would like to have an affordable and legal option available to me. It is not acceptable for women to be denied the choice of place of birth, and it is not acceptable that private midwives are going to be put out of business by the much larger and more powerful medical lobby (and the Australian Government's fear of that lobby's wrath). Please keep in mind that publicly-funded homebirth is a service that is readily available and widely- used in countries such as the United Kingdom, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

I wish to impress upon the Committee the implications for birth choices for women – for when you remove a birth choice, despite the fact that only a small percentage of

women opt for it, you remove that choice for all women. There is also the impact on a small but growing number of private midwives who are passionate about what they do and will be either forced out of self-employment, forced to work in hospital systems that do not provide woman-centred care, or forced to attend homebirths underground. I have also undertaken to complete a Bachelor of Midwifery, the goal in mind being to practice as a homebirth midwife eventually. If the current state of affairs persists, this will be illegal before I even have a chance to finish my degree.

Thank you for your time and consideration.