

Elton Humphrey
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra 2600 ACT

20/7/09

Dear Committee Secretary,

I am writing to you out of concern regarding the proposed legislation change put forward by Nicola Roxon regarding making home birthing with a midwife illegal in the near future.

It is not easy to write this letter as the taboo surrounding speaking out for home births or the right to have them is still considerable. I am a respected health practitioner in the local community and have good contacts in the Academic world of my profession, but to speak out like this on this issue raises feelings of vulnerability, that aren't part of my day to day reality. It is because of the importance of this topic I have persevered with this letter.

I have had many conversations with women from the Adelaide Hills about childbirth and most have had a range of positive reactions to the idea of home births, if not a desire to pursue one themselves. Women know about the challenges of birthing and the idea of wanting to birth in one's own home, one's safe haven, is instantly understood by most women. The research available on home birthing goes into detail about why this physically supports the mother, baby and birth process, and this isn't the venue to do that in, but I highly recommend investigating the evidence behind why women are right to presume there are great benefits in having a home birth.

On a personal note, I am a mother of two healthy, strapping young boys. I had a hospital birth first and then a homebirth with my second child. I had pro's and con's with both and was glad that all the choices and supports were available both times. What I particularly experienced as positive about the home birth, was the 6 weeks and more of midwife care from immediately after the birth – in the home and by phone – to support and establish good breast feeding, deal with anxieties, and link me with other services as required. The pre-natal support in the home over the last 6 months or so of the pregnancy, and the link between that time and the birth and post natal period provided assistance for our whole family that we could not have experienced through a system that forbids a midwife to attend a birth in a home, (please see below).

In further detail, the *EXPOSURE DRAFT OF THE HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION NATIONAL LAW 2009* specifically states that;

101 Conditions of registration

(1) If a National Board decides to register a person in the health profession for which the Board is established, the registration is subject to the following conditions:

(a) for a registered health practitioner other than a health practitioner who holds non-practising registration:

(i) that the registered health practitioner must complete the continuing professional development program required by the National Board, and

(ii) that the registered health practitioner must not practise the health profession unless professional indemnity insurance arrangements are in force in relation to the practitioner's practice of the profession

This essentially bars homebirth midwives from registration as professional indemnity insurance is not available for them, as well as making it illegal for them to continue supporting women at homebirths with no registration.

In addition there is another section to the legislation which concerns me;

Subdivision 6 General

148 Directing or inciting unprofessional conduct or professional misconduct

(1) A person must not direct or incite a registered health practitioner to do anything, in the course of the practitioner's practice of the health profession, that amounts to unprofessional conduct or professional misconduct.

Maximum penalty:

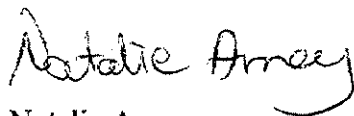
(a) in the case of an individual—\$30,000, or

(b) in the case of a body corporate—\$60,000.

As a professional, I think the discipline of midwifery deserves to have more choices available to its hard working students and staff than working in a hospital. I understand the insurance issues are a big part of the problem with private midwifery, but how much of life should be determined by insurance processes. There are more important things that will be lost than some insurance battles, if we allow insurance to dictate medical practice.

My GP delivered many, many babies at homes in England prior to working in Australia, and did so from a practice of doctors doing the same work. Many more babies the world over are born at home than in hospitals, at least in this country we are wealthy enough to afford to pay skilled midwives to attend, and those employing private midwives are . To take this option away from educated and aware Australian women, especially my community – Adelaide Hills women, would be to take away a human right and to deny a valuable and worthy aspect of this part of our society – a full range of choice for those who want the best birth possible for their children.

Yours Sincerely



Natalie Arney