

Dear Senator,

We read with great anxiety the intentions of the current government to outlaw home birthing by not allowing home birth midwives indemnity insurance.

In 2007 our family was residing in New Zealand for 2 year work contract. My husband and I are both Australian citizens. When we fell pregnant with our third child we were lucky enough to encounter New Zealand's maternal health system. Having had two previous natural births in Australian hospitals I was encouraged to explore a home birth. This initially came about due to the stress that I encountered getting to the labour ward during my second birth. We had to drive across Adelaide and when we reached the hospital I was required to fill in paperwork. We then had to ask people for directions to get to a place to give birth. This is not in my mind an effective way to treat a woman in the throws of labour. And grossly misunderstands her needs. Because of the stress I encountered getting to where I needed to be my body released Adrenalin (a stress hormone) which I have researched counteracts the effects of oxytocin (the labour drug). My labour was long and I started to enter the realms of maternal exhaustion. I was strong enough to get through it but had I not had to move from my home I believe my labour would have been shorter and I would have had a healthier happier easier start to mothering. My decision was made. If I were to experience birth again it would be where I had control of the situation. This was fundamental to me to protect my self and my unborn child.

In New Zealand upon learning I was pregnant I made contact with a home birth midwife. She came to see me at 6 weeks of gestation. Thereafter, monthly, until the second trimester. Then her visits became a weekly turn until the 40th week when she visited us daily. Getting to know this woman over a ten month period, I became educated about birth, more so than I had ever done going through the hospital system in Australia with my previous two pregnancies. We formed a relationship and I developed an innate sense of trust. I was also a member of the Kapiti home birth Association. Women with like minded ideas would gather together on a monthly basis with children for an informal chat, sharing of experiences and giving advice.

When it came to my third birth I was better prepared than the my previous births. I was empowered with knowledge and had the gentle direction of a woman whom I had trust in. I had the backing of a maternal health system that had been supporting home birthing for two decades. My mother and husband were also present. Alexandra's birth was the most empowering experience of my life. I would wish that every woman in Australia could have and experience such as mine. When she was born, she did not cry, but gazed around the room. It was midnight. The lights were dimmed. Soft music was playing. She entered the world peacefully surrounded by love. My mother cried. It was the first time in her life that she had experienced natural birth even though she has three children. The way I believe every parent would have their child enter the world given the choice. My mothers choices were not enough to allow her to experience the power of natural birth in the 60's and 70's in Australia. I will not allow this to be the case for my daughters.

Why then would the Australian Government want to take away this choice? The most natural choice there is, to give birth at home. Rather than deny families of choices why not empower them with knowledge. Believe it or not women were giving birth long before the medical profession began. Women know how to give birth naturally. What we require is education and knowledge to make the best choices.

Yours sincerely,

Penelope Haley