

Kate Waud

Submission to Senate

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

My name is Kate Waud and I am the mother of three children, all of which we birthed at home. During the pregnancy of our first child Brendon, we were living in Perth and had access to the Community Midwifery Program, which was wonderful. We had all the support we wanted, and were able to develop a good relationship with our midwife. This was an important thing for me, because I felt that she understood what I wanted out of my birthing experience and understood that I was going to be in control during the birth. We had a wonderful water birth, which was everything I had hoped it would be. The intimacy, mood and empowerment were second to none and we were both ecstatic with the experience.

We then moved to Albany and found that there was no option to having a midwife present during a homebirth. Not only that but that no doctor would see me unless I was having a hospital birth. Both my husband and I had done extensive research and were both informed and educated on the subject. We felt that birthing at home was the only place where all of our needs for a safe, happy birth were going to be met. We again had an ecstatic water birth for our second child Connor, with Brendon being present. We had a friend come over and help with Brendon and keeping the hot water coming for the birthing tub. It was in just as amazing as our first birth, and I would say that I felt even more empowered after the second birth than the first. Even though our choice would have been to have a midwife during that birth, it wasn't an option.

By the time I was pregnant with our third child Deva we didn't even bother trying to find out if any midwives were doing homebirths at the time, or if any doctors would see me in case I had any complications. Again we had a water birth at home with just our children, which was just as good as the others. The boys were hopping in and out of the tub while I was in there, and Brendon went to help deliver Deva as she was being born.

I don't believe that I put either myself or my children at risk in any way, I was a fit and healthy young woman (aged 20 for my first birth, 22 for our second and 24 for our last), have an amazingly loving and supportive husband and made sure that we were both well read, and educated before we made our decisions. I believe that there would be many more women who would have homebirths if midwives were available for them. If they are healthy women who have a loving and supportive family then I believe that having your children at home is the safest place. I know four other women who have had their children at home without a midwife in the last four years. Having children at

home for our family was the right thing for us to do. I think that many women underestimate the potential experiences available to them during birthing, which is a shame.

I am writing today with great concern that the draft legislation to establish a National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for all Health Professionals by July 2010 presents a very serious infraction to the rights of women to make choices about their health care during pregnancy and birth. If private practice midwives are unable to register, making it illegal for them to attend homebirths, I believe that the human rights of women and babies are threatened. I see it as a possible contravention of the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the United Nations Statement on the Rights of Women (1995), which states “**Women have the right to have control over, and decide freely and responsibly on all matters relating to their sexual and reproductive health**”.

Denying indemnity insurance to private homebirth midwives represents an inequitable failure to protect a significant group of health consumers. It prevents many women accessing registered midwives. Hospital “in-the-home” programs that are available in some states are too restrictive to offer real choice to a significant number of women. These programs are limited to very small geographic areas and they are only available to people who are categorised as “low-risk”, a categorisation that does not appear to be evidence-based. They may also require women to adhere to protocols that take some of their choices away. The federal government should step in to ensure that this is not the only option for homebirth in Australia.

Women must be able to access registered midwives no matter where they live. The federal government is responsible for protecting the rights of women and their families to choose their health-care provider and to find someone who supports them to make informed decisions about what happens throughout their pregnancy and birth. Please do not support legislation that will remove women’s rights to make choices about where and with whom they give birth. Please provide some measures to protect private midwifery and their consumers. Please do not force women who choose to give birth at home to do so without a registered midwife present.

Sincerely,

Kate Waud