

Dear Senator,

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Health  
Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and  
two  
related bills

I am a Birth Educator, Doula, Yoga Instructor and mother of 4 (soon to be  
five) (with a BA). I see 30-40 pregnant women each week through prenatal  
yoga classes and I constantly hear that they feel their choices are not  
adequate. Even though many of them have not chosen homebirth for  
themselves  
(often through fear and misinformation) they are unanimously appalled  
that  
homebirth will be illegal next year and that our politicians are  
dictating  
women's decisions regarding where and how they give birth.

The women's birth stories that I hear are all too often traumatic due to  
the  
overuse of intervention and abuse of power over a woman when she is in  
the  
vulnerable position of labour.

Women choose homebirth because it is a safe and viable option with  
experienced midwives who have a different set of skills to the  
medicalised  
model of birth. Evidence shows that homebirths have the same outcomes as  
hospital births regarding maternity & foetal deaths but these figures are  
achieved with LESS intervention resulting in a more positive experience  
for  
mother and baby. This also achieves a healthier mental, physical and  
emotional state for both mother and baby.

My first baby was born at the RHW Randwick Birth Centre and was straight  
forward. My second was caesarean (due to placenta previa) and the  
following  
two at home. I chose homebirth because I knew my chances of a successful  
VBAC (Vaginal Birth after Caesarean) in hospital was much lower than at  
home  
as all the monitoring and fear is a double edged sword. Each  
intervention,  
interference, disturbance increases the likelihood of a larger more  
complicated intervention. This is proven and accepted by all sides of  
the  
profession.

When the hormones of labour are studied we can see that a woman needs to  
feel SAFE, WARM and UNDISTURBED for her body to birth efficiently. This  
is  
why many women choose homebirth and THE CRIME WILL BE HAVING HOMEBIRTH  
TAKEN  
AWAY FROM THOSE WHO CHOOSE IT.

Homebirth is also the CONTROL GROUP in our society regarding the  
wellbeing  
of mother and baby in normal birth. We will be at risk of losing the  
knowledge that these mothers, fathers and midwives have if we no longer  
allow this practice. We will completely lose the experience of the many,  
many benefits of the natural birth.

Homebirth is also important for a Sustainable Health System. Our hospitals are already overburdened. The amount of resources and expenses required for a natural birth in hospital far exceeds those of a homebirth. KEEP THE HOSPITAL BEDS FOR THOSE IN NEED. A pregnant woman is not sick. Birth is not an illness. Private midwives are extremely competent and experienced in birth as well dealing with the unexpected outcomes. They are highly skilled professionals.

I would not feel safe to birth in hospital. It should be a time for joy - not trauma - and this is fundamentally why I choose homebirth for the safe delivery of my babies.

I am concerned that there is not a private midwife on your board Advisory Board. This surely means that the practice is not understood. The Obstetricians who support the denial of homebirth to women obviously have no understanding or knowledge of it. I could confidently assume they have never attended a homebirth. Most obstetricians have never witnessed a natural birth from the onset of labour to the delivery of the placenta. They are not experts in this area. They are experts in surgery, not in natural birth process. Independent midwives are experts in the natural birth process. So, please ask them about their practice.

I am concerned at the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Runoff Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009, which are currently the subject of an Inquiry by the Committee on Community Affairs.

The bills expand the role of midwives in the provision of maternity services, but exclude midwives who attend births at home. By excluding these midwives, the Government is effectively making attended homebirth illegal. This is because, under the proposed National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, due to be implemented in July 2010, any midwife who cannot obtain insurance cannot be registered. Laws in many states make it a criminal act for an unregistered midwife to attend a birth, and the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme also imposes a fine for doing so.

If enacted, rules made under the bills before the Parliament will make it illegal for a qualified midwife to attend a homebirth in Australia. Such a move is dangerous for mothers and babies, bucks international trends in maternity care, and is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care.

With extremely high intervention rates in hospital, many women are afraid to birth in hospitals and believe their only chance at natural childbirth is at home. If it becomes illegal for registered, highly skilled midwives to care for these women, many will feel they have no option other than to birth unattended. This legislation unintentionally promotes this practice, which is directly contrary to the World Health Organization's objective of having a skilled attendant at every birth. I am extremely concerned that the legislation will result in unnecessary deaths of babies and mothers, and may also result in midwives being fined and jailed if they assist labouring women. This is an absurd situation in a modern democracy.

In the UK, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands, homebirth is publicly funded and supported. I am not aware of another country in the world where a midwife can be jailed for attending a homebirth.

Australian women must all be entitled to the same Medicare support wherever they give birth, and midwives must all be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work.

Yours sincerely  
Tara Darlington