

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in regard to proposed legislation which will essentially outlaw homebirth by July 2010.

I currently live in a rural area with three birthing options - a medically managed birth in the local hospital, a homebirth attended by qualified independent midwives or freebirth. Personally I have had two children and am expecting my third. My first child was born in a birth centre in Sydney, my second child was born at home and I was attended by two independent midwives and for my third child I am planning another homebirth with the same independent midwives. If the proposed legislation goes through, I will not be having any more children. I am not the only who feels this strongly.

It angers me that our government wants to take away a woman's choice as to where she births her children. I have been so lucky that I have had such positive birth experiences. My pregnancies have been fairly straightforward and complication free, I do not feel that birthing in a hospital is necessary.

My second birth would have no doubt ended up in an emergency Cesarean had I been in my local hospital. Both my pregnancies have gone over the allotted gestation time frame given by most hospitals and my second labour went for sixteen hours which is four hours over the general time limit that women are given to be in labour. It is not in the best interests of the mother and baby to put time limits on gestation and labour, I think it is more a case of placing efficiency and fear of litigation first. Looking at things from a financial perspective, how much would it have cost Medicare if I had been induced at forty weeks, given the obligatory epidural then rushed into theatre for an emergency Cesarean for failure to progress?! What about the emotional trauma of going through all of that? How would it affect the breastfeeding relationship?

I have heard disparaging comments regarding homebirthing mothers being selfish and only worrying about their surroundings during labour and not what is best for their baby. I believe homebirth is the best thing for my baby due to the fact that there is no medical intervention, no drugs, no pressure to progress by a certain time, immediate bonding and focus on the breastfeeding relationship but most importantly there are two qualified midwives who are constantly updating their information and skills there exclusively for myself and my baby.

I understand that not everybody wants to give birth at home. What I don't understand is why every other birth choice is supported by the government except homebirth. How much money have I saved the government by staying at home? When the medical system appears to be under great strain doesn't it make sense to encourage homebirth with independent midwives? The complete cost is covered by the family, the government doesn't pay a cent.

Homebirth has been normal in Holland for a great many years, maybe the Australian government could look to studies done on this when assessing risk.

<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/abstract/313/7068/1309>

If homebirth is outlawed, what choices will be left for women like myself? Either go to hospital and endure unwanted medical intervention or freebirth and put mother and baby at risk. You may say that unwanted medical intervention is not always going to be the case in hospital but in a rural area where that is the accepted culture I would have to fight tooth and nail to be left to birth in my own time drug free. As for freebirthing, I am not comfortable with this option due to the fact that if my baby were born not breathing or there was a complication during labour there would be no immediate medical assistance. A baby could die waiting for an ambulance if complications are not picked up on soon enough.

I personally think that freebirthing numbers will go through the roof if women are pushed into making a decision between hospital and freebirth. If this is the case, won't there be more strain on the emergency departments in hospitals across the country?

I sincerely hope that this legislation is dropped and that independent midwives are supported. These midwives give their lives to their profession, there are no set shifts, there are no trips away for them they are always on call. They are there for us constantly, empowering women, giving us confidence in ourselves and our bodies to do what nature intended. Please don't take that away from us.

Yours sincerely

Dianne Dawes